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Beyond Life And Death Images Of Exceptional Women And Chinese Modernity

Wei Hu
University of South Carolina

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BEYOND LIFE AND DEATH
IMAGES OF EXCEPTIONAL WOMEN AND CHINESE MODERNITY

by

Wei Hu

Bachelor of Arts
Beijing Language and Culture University, 2002

Master of Laws
Beijing Language and Culture University, 2005

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University of South Carolina

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Accepted by:

Michael Gibbs Hill, Major Professor

Alexander Jamieson Beecroft, Committee Member

Krista Jane Van Fleit, Committee Member

Amanda S. Wangwright, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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DEDICATION

To My parents, Hu Quanlin and Liu Meilian

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ABSTRACT

The turning of the twentieth century witnessed the dramatic transformation of Chinese society. In searching for a modern nation, Chinese women, in many political and literary works, were portrayed as both the emblem of China's problems and the crucial solution. Despite growing scholarly interest in the entanglement between Chinese nationalist and feminist discourses, much remains to be explored, especially from the perspective of how Chinese people approached their own past and tradition. My project will approach these discourses via the question of women from the non-Western perspective by exploring the images of "exceptional woman" (*nü haojie* 女豪傑) in literary narratives and rhetoric in late imperial China. While many scholars have examined representations of women's images of this time, I focus on those of "exceptional women" to explore the greater values embedded within the process of shaping, which demonstrate that "exceptional women" connote more significant understandings than the general categories, such as "women heroes" or "women soldiers." In this dissertation, I study three types of women specifically: female martyr, radical female assassins with scientific ideas, and feminist reformers and activists for women's rights. By examining the illustrations, transformations, and circulation of images of these exceptional women in media and literary works, this project explores how modernization in China was mediated by the tension between past and present, East and West, as well as how literary writings inspired and encouraged both national

salvation and feminist emancipation. This project also investigates the connections between literary genres and feminist presentation, and contributes to the fields of gender studies, genre studies, and literary circulation and imagination.

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INTRODUCTION

The turn of the twentieth century witnessed the dramatic transformation of Chinese society. Chinese people used to claim that China was a “Celestial Empire” (*Tianchao shangguo* 天朝上國), which could not be defeated by barbarians (*yidi* 夷狄). However, the Opium Wars not only broke Chinese people’s dream but also turned the issue of life and death into a very crucial matter for both the Chinese nation and its people. Responding to this important issue, Chinese literati and scholars made great efforts in order to establish a modern society. In the process of searching for a modern nation, the imagination of Chinese modernity was associated with female figures. In many literary and political works, Chinese women were portrayed as both the emblem of China’s problem and the crucial solution. Therefore, the question of Chinese women is often characterized by entanglements and contestations between nationalist discourses and feminist discourses.

Many scholars have discussed Chinese modernity through their analysis of various representations of exemplary women, such as “new women” (*xin nüxing* 新女性), the “woman citizen” (*nü guomin* 女國民) and “mothers of the nation” (*guomin zhi mu* 國民之母).¹ For instance, in her book, *Tales of Translation: Composing the New Woman in*

¹ Selected influential works are listed in bibliography, including Tani E. Barlow (1994, 2004), Meng Yue (1994), Carol C. Chin, Hu Ying (2000), Jin Feng (2004), Amy D. Dooling (2005).

China, 1899-1918, through the lens of translation, Hu Ying examines how, why, and in what way the “New Women” emerged at the turning of the twentieth-century China. Carol C. Chin’s article, “Translating the New Women: Chinese Feminists View the West, 1905-15,” also explores the contested relationship between nationalism and feminism as well as some the tensions in the concepts of modernity, and writes about the “New Women” through careful examination of several early women’s periodicals, such as *Funü shibao* 婦女時報. Japanese historian Mizuyo Sudo’s article “Concepts of Women’s Rights in Modern China” examines how the concepts of “women’s rights,” “people’s/civil rights,” and “human rights” appeared in modern China, and “then turns to a more detailed exploration of the evolution of the concept of ‘women’s rights’ and its gendered implications” (Ko and Wang 14). All these scholars address women’s roles in modernity through the study on different categories of women at this time. Compared with the categories of “new women,” the “woman citizen,” and “mothers of the nation,” the images of *nü haojie* 女豪傑, hereafter translated as “exceptional women,” are less studied. However, there is still space to further explore the significant role that this kind of womanhood played as a trope in both social understandings and expectations in that particular historical moment—a moment of life and death for both the nation and Chinese people.

The catchphrase “exceptional women” was widely circulated in newspapers, journals, and various forms of literature during this time. Different types of exceptional women, domestic or foreign, real or creative figures, were presented in various genres of publications. With the influence of nationalist concerns and the global impact of feminism, stories about foreign female exemplars such as Madame Roland (French), Joan

of Arc (French), Sophia Perovskaia (Russian) and Florence Nightingale (British) were widely circulated in publications. Consequently, traditional categories such as “chaste women” and “chivalric women” gradually interacted with emergent female exemplars such as “woman citizen” (*nü guomin* 女國民) and “woman revolutionary” (*nü gemingdang* 女革命黨), and more and more Chinese versions of Madame Roland, Sophia, and Nightingale emerged. Impacted by these foreign women, many authors began to write stories about both foreign and Chinese exceptional women, such as “The Biography of Madame Roland—the First Exceptional Woman of Modern Society” (*jinshi diyi nühaojie luolan furen zhuan* 近世第一女豪傑羅蘭夫人傳) (1902) by Liang Qichao 梁啟超,² *The Exceptional Woman from Eastern Europe* (*Dongou nü haojie* 東歐女豪傑) (1902-1903) by Lingnan yuyi nüshi 嶺南羽衣女士, and *The New Exceptional Women in China* (*Zhongguo xin nühao* 中國新女豪) (1907) by Zhan Kai 詹塏 (c. 1860–c. 1910). As a result, “exceptional women” became an emerging model of femininity that attracted more and more attention. In the *tanci* 彈詞³ *The Stone of Jingwei* (*Jingwei Shi* 精衛石) (1905-1907), the woman author Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875-1907) wrote, “Everyday I pray for (Chinese) women, and I wish they will throw off the shackles and become excellent women, women heroes, and exceptional women standing on the stage of a new world with freedom, just like Roland, Sophia, Beecher⁴...” (592-3). As Qiu Jin expected, many

² *Dongou nü haojie* 東歐女豪傑 (The Biography of Madame Roland) was first published in *Xinmin Congbao* 新民叢報 (New Citizens) on issue No 17 and 18. It was soon republished in *Nü bao* 女報 (Women’s Newspaper) and *Nüxue bao* 女學報 (Women’s Education Newspaper).

³ *tanci* 彈詞 is a distinctive Chinese form of narrative written in rhymed lines during the late imperial to early modern period.

⁴ Beecher refers to Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

historical Chinese women, such as herself and Hui Xing 惠興 (1870-1905), were praised as exceptional women. Moreover, exceptional women were also presented in literary works, such as Xu Pingquan 許平權 and Yuan Zhenniang 袁貞娘 in *Prison Flowers* (*nü yuhua* 女獄花) (1904), Jin Yaose 金瑤瑟 in *Goddess Nüwa's Stone* (*Nüwa shi* 女媧石) (1904), Huang Xiuqiu 黃繡球 in *Huang Xiuqiu* (1905), and Meng Dimin 孟迪民 in *Chivalry Beauties* (*xiayi jiaren* 俠義佳人) (1907). However, some Chinese scholars do not differentiate “exceptional women” from “women heroes” (*nü yingxiong* 女英雄), and believe that the heroic actions of exceptional women either represent nationalist concerns or simply illustrate patriotism.⁵

This dissertation will explore the greater values embedded within the construction of “exceptional women” in political and literary narratives and rhetoric, because both the expression “exceptional women” (*nü haojie* 女豪傑) and the process of shaping their images connotes the interpretation and evaluation of certain historical, cultural, and gender norms. As Tani E. Barlow reveals that different linguistic categories concerning women and their subjects reflect the complexity of Chinese feminism. What it means to be “woman” (*nüxing* 女性, *nüren* 女人, *funü* 婦女 or *nüzi* 女子) in Chinese contexts is associated with the way of thinking and the processes of gendering (*The Question of Women* 37-63). The construction of “exceptional women” also conveys certain understandings on the power structures, social and political environment, and gender relations. The character *hao* 豪 originally refers to *shi* 豕 (boar), and it has many meanings. In ancient texts, sometimes, it is also interchangeable with the character *hao*

⁵ See Zhou Leshi (2012), Xia Xiaohong (1995).

毫 which means “small, trivial, and insignificant.” In the expression *haojie* 豪傑,⁶ which is usually used with *yingxiong* 英雄 (hero), *hao* 豪 generally refers to “people of extraordinary talent, power, or ability” (漢語大詞典 *Comprehensive Chinese Dictionary* 548-50). Within a social structure, which is regulated by norms and rules, the paradoxical concepts conveyed by *hao* 毫 and *hao* 豪 are both integrated in the characteristics of *haojie* 豪傑 (exceptional people). In addition to the dichotomous meanings of the character *hao* 豪, the expression *nü haojie* 女豪傑 also indicates a direct contrast. “Woman” (*nü* 女) must be indicated, because otherwise, the expression *haojie* 豪傑 will “naturally” represent masculine power.

I propose to translate the expression *nü haojie* 女豪傑 as “exceptional women” because the significance of “exceptionalness.” Generally speaking, exceptional people are comparatively limited in quantity, i. e., they are “small and trivial” (*hao* 毫) in numbers, because according to existing social norms or rules, their behaviors, actions, or speeches are “not included,” therefore they are “different from others.” However, even though existing rules may “not apply” to exceptional people, they are not totally rejected by society.⁷ In fact, in some situations, they play “significant” roles and their influence

⁶ “Haojie” can be traced in *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji* 史記) and *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguozhi* 三國志). *Shiji: Chenshe Shijia* 《史記·陳涉世家》, “数日, 号令召三老, 豪杰与皆来会计事” (In several days, Chen ordered the local officials and influential people to get together and to discuss how to deal with the current situation). *Sanguozhi: Zhugeliang* 《三國志·諸葛亮傳》, “自董卓已來豪傑并起 ...” (More extraordinary people have emerged since Dong Zhuo is in power...).

⁷ I borrow the phrases, “different from others” and “not apply” from the explanation of “exception” in Merriam-Webster dictionary, which defines “exception” as: 1) Someone or something that is different from others; someone or something that is not included; 2) A case where a rule does not apply.

can be “extraordinary,” especially in indicating the complicated relationship between “exceptionalness” and “rules.”

As the famous proverb, “The exception proves the rule,” demonstrates, the relationship between “the exception” and “the rule” has been interpreted in various ways. Some people may argue that “the exception proves the existence of the rule” emphasizes that the rule still maintain generalization despite exceptions. Contrarily, some people may question the meaning of the word “prove,” which can be interpreted as “to test.” Based on this interpretation, instead of demonstrating the existence or the correction (in certain sense) of the rules, the exceptions put the rules to the test and question the “validity” and “genuineness” of the rules, or, in other words, “the exception is conceptualized as a transgression against a firmly established natural law” (Sheriff 1). These two kinds of explanations represent different attitudes towards the influence of “the exceptions” on “the rules.” For the former, the exceptions cannot shake the authority of the rule. Compared to the dominance created by the rule, the limited exceptional cases only reinforce the rule by showing how powerful the rule can be. For the latter, however, the exceptions can bring negative impacts on the rule. The exceptional cases may trouble the public order and challenge both the stability and performance of the rule. The disparate understandings of the roles of the exceptions in a society make the concepts of “exceptionalness” so meaningful.

Together with this philosophical context, the social and historical environment of China at turning of the twentieth century also makes the expression, “exceptional women,” significant, especially in terms of revealing the complexity of women’s questions. On the one hand, the impact of Western thought contributes to the shaping of exceptional women

who question and challenge traditional orthodoxy of womanhood. But on the other hand, images of exceptional women cannot totally neglect or break away from thousands of years of Chinese traditional norms and regulations defined by men and established in a patriarchal power system. It is through negotiations with both the “new ideas” (generally referred to modern influences) and the existing rules (featured with patriarchal characteristics) that exceptional women participate in the nationalist and feminist discourses. Although exceptional women were generally valued because of their contributions to national salvation, their struggle against patriarchal domination should not and cannot be obliterated by patriarchal nationalism. Therefore, from the perspective of feminist studies, the considerations of gender and power are also very important when analyzing images of exceptional women and their relationships with the discourse of Chinese modernity.

In this dissertation, it is with considerations on gender relations, power dynamics, and the themes of life and death that I designate three types women--female martyr, radical female assassins with scientific ideas, and feminist reformers and activists for women's rights—within the category of exceptional women. By studying these women as exceptional women—they are either explicitly addressed as “exceptional women” or implicitly praised as exceptional women because of distinguish philosophies or behaviors—in political and social narratives and literary representations, I intend to emphasize that they struggle for their better lives through the methods that are generally considered as out of the ordinary. Particularly, their unique understandings of the social impact and consequence of “death” as well as their interpretations of the role of “killing” played as a weapon make these women different from other women as fascinating

figures/characters for both Chinese literati and the ordinary people. Through exploring the implication and complexity within the shaping, publication and circulation of these exceptional women, I argue that the expression “exceptional women” indicates a complex mixture of interpretation, appropriation, and expectation. This expression not only breaks the boundaries and concepts of traditional categories on womanhood in China, but also appropriates modern features into the construction and imagination of the new exemplary women. Whereas the catchphrase “new women” emphasizes the “newness,” “exceptional women” highlights the signification of “distinction.” The portrayal of exceptional women is rich and diversified. The shaping of “exceptional women” is an important nexus that intervenes into the dynamic dialogues between tradition and modern, China and the West, nationalist discourse and feminist discourse. Although there are many ways to interpret exceptional women, I want to focus specially on the issue of life and death because exceptional women’s choice to live or die, their interpretations of the power over life and death, their extraordinary actions at the life-and-death moment, and their desires for better lives all discursively project the greater understandings of national salvation and feminist emancipation. By exploring the power dynamics behind the question of life and death, I argue that the process of shaping “exceptional women” is also a process of re-adjusting China’s own past into that particular situation, re-positioning women’s place in the gender relations, and re-defining feminist power and women’s rights in the masculine power dominated system.

Engaging with the Discourse of Women in Chinese Modernity

The concept of modernity has been regarded as an important element in shaping contemporary China, and is therefore instrumental in shaping exceptional women. There are various perspectives on what modernity means to China and how Chinese literati approach modernization. Considering the complexity of modernity and the quantities of works related to this topic by numerous scholars, my focus here is to discuss how the study of exceptional women is related to Chinese modernity and how my dissertation is inspired by certain scholars and works.

For a certain period of time, Chinese modernization was viewed as the sole result of Western influence, and Chinese people were considered passive receivers and participants. However, many current scholars seek to look beyond those long-studied perspectives and examine Chinese modernity as the product of China's own distinct history in works such as David Der-wei Wang's *Fin-de-siecle Splendor*, Lydia Liu's *Translingual Practice*, Edmund S.K. Fung's *The Intellectual Foundations of Chinese Modernity*, and the volume *Becoming Chinese* edited by Yeh Wen-hsin, and etc. Through their works on various topics pertaining to modern China, scholars view modernity as a dynamic process that is complicated by multiple voices and welcomes the participation of various sectors of Chinese society. Scholars have also believed that, as Chinese literati imagined and experienced the modern at the turning of the twentieth century, they were not passive or subordinate when they participated in discourses on politics, ideology, the nation, and modernity. Therefore, Chinese modernity, as a multifaceted enterprise that manifested in multiple forms and shapes, is characterized by Chinese appropriation of its own tradition and foreign culture.

Because of this special feature of Chinese modernity, the question of women within the discourse of modernity, also takes into consideration the relationships between China's own history and the impact of Western thought, as many scholars have shown. For example, in the collection *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period* edited by Rebecca E. Karl and Peter Zarrow, scholars systematically raise many questions related to the relationship between the nation and gender. As a useful category of analysis, gender figures prominently in the articles. While authors of those articles re-investigate and re-interpret the 1898 Reform period, they invite readers to pay attention to the openness and experiments created by both new possibilities and old verities at that time. In another collection, *Beyond Tradition and Modernity* edited by Grace S. Fong, Nanxiu Qian, and Harriet Thelma Zurndorfer, scholars studying the nineteenth and twentieth century transition stress the importance of rethinking the binaries that are commonly used to define this period. They encourage the re-examination of familiar historical terrain from new perspectives.

As such, this revisionist scholarship provides a useful framework to rethink the transformation of traditional Chinese womanhood at the turning of the twentieth century. For example, in the book, *Precious Raft of History*, Joan Judge regards women as central to Chinese modernity (7). She focuses on women's biographies to examine the interpretations of feminist virtue, talent, and heroism at that time in order to explore the distinctiveness of both the Chinese women question and modernity. Instead of using the categories of conservative, reformist, and revolutionary to examine images of women, Judge challenges these categories by reading the texts through the unique perspective of

four modes of “chronotypes” (13),⁸ which reflect the range of historical, political, and gender views during that period. Based on these four modes, Judge discusses how she understands the relationship of past and present, China and the West, politics and social practices, the existing regimes and the representations/reconstruction of feminine virtue, talents, and heroism at the turn of the century.

Judge not only recognizes the importance of examining modernity and the women question, but also acknowledges the necessity of exploring these issues from new perspectives and considering all possible categories for women at this time. Drawing inspiration from Judge, I intend to specifically study a new feminine model—exceptional women—a category less studied when compared to other feminine models such as “new women” and “women citizens.” Like Judge, I would like to rethink the usual categories to study womanhood. However, unlike Judge, I have created the categories within exceptional women, based on my interpretations of their different attitudes towards life and death, and because of the role killing plays in national salvation and women’s emancipation. Within these distinctions, I have also created my own framework to examine womanhood from another perspective. The “exceptional women” was not only also characterized with the transformation of the traditional feminine, but also represented Chinese literati’s responses to the challenges from Western ideas at that time. In addition, the catchphrase, “exceptional women,” also connotes a sense of a paradoxical connection between women and dominate power structures. Even though the influences of “exceptional women” were limited, the values created in the process of shaping and circulating the images of exceptional women are still worthy of further examination.

⁸ Judge names these four chronotypes as “eternalist, meliorist, archeomodernist, and presentist.”

Because as I have mentioned before, these figures provide a key to understanding the intersections between tradition and modern, China and the West, as well as nationalist and feminist discourses. Additionally, these figures offer an interesting intervention to the question of life and death.

Rethinking the Question of Life and Death from a Power Dynamics Perspective

To live or to die, does a person really have a choice? Does a person possess the right to life or death? Some Confucius philosophers believe that “life and death is determined by fate; wealth and rank is a matter of destiny” 生死有命, 富貴在天 as it was said by Zixia 子夏 in *Analects* • *Yanyuan* 論語 • 顏淵. However, some philosophers, such as Mozi 墨子, strongly object to the theory of fate (*ming* 命). In his famous work *Against Fate* (*feiming* 非命), Mozi elaborates his anti-fatalist philosophy:

If the gentlemen of the world really desire to procure benefits for the world and destroy its calamities, they cannot but vigorously refute the doctrine of fatalism. For fatalism was an invention of the wicked kings and the practice of miserable men. It was not a doctrine of the magnanimous. Therefore, those who practice magnanimity and righteousness must examine it and vigorously refute it.

For Mozi, people were able to direct their own lives as long as they could use their own senses to observe the world as well as to judge objects and events. Despite these different understandings of life and death, one thing that they have in common is that they all presume a certain kind of power behind the matter of life and death. For Zixia, it is *ming* 命 which can be interpreted as “fate, ritual, orthodoxy, ideology,

traditions, etc.” that performs as a dominant power, whereas for Mozi, it is people who have the power to lead their own lives.

Western scholars also have different interpretations of the term “power.” Their debates on the definition and concept of power, especially what kind of power it is and how much influence this power can do, no doubt, are characterized by controversial and intractable disagreements. One of the main disparities is whether or not we should interpret power as an exercise of power-over or power as an ability to perform actions. The former defines power as the authority or dominancy to control others, whereas the latter define power as a capacity to act, to execute, and to function. Max Weber’s definition of power is generally regarded as a foundation for the theory of “power-over”⁹ because Weber defines power as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis of which this possibility rests” (Weber 53). Michel Foucault further presupposes power as a kind of power-over by arguing that, “if we speak of the power of laws, institutes, and ideologies, if we speak of the structures or the mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others” (“The Subject and Power” 337). Based on these scholars’ theories, in a sense, power is granted a feature of dominancy as it favors the person “in position” with his own will. Moreover, oppression is an inherent property of power because power is exercised over others regardless of the wills of “others,” even the “resistance.”

The definition of power as “power-to” is derived from Thomas Hobbes’s masterwork *Leviathan*, in which power is described in a very fascinating way. Hobbes

⁹ The terms, “power-over” used here and “power-to” mentioned later, are with reference of the entry “Feminist Perspectives on Power” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

believes that “the power of a man, ... is his present means, to obtain some future apparent good, and is either original or instrumental” (Hobbes 53). Hobbes further explains that the natural kind of power, which is derived from inborn abilities of the body and mind, includes extraordinary strength, prudence, wit, and liberality, while the instrumental kind is acquired from the advantages of friends, money, or reputation. Hanna Pitkin also claims, that “power is a something—anything—in which makes or renders somebody able to do, capable of doing something. Power is capacity, potential, ability, or wherewithal” (Pitkin 276). In this sense, power-to can turn people, including the non-dominant “others,” into someone powerful.

Based on the various definitions of fate and power, I propose to examine the question of life and death through the concepts of “power-over” and “power-to” to explore both sides of the subtle relationship between power and the interpretations of domination and subordination, oppression and resistance. On the one hand, we have to acknowledge the dominating nature associated with power and realize the existence of oppressive situations aroused by “power-over.” On the other hand, we cannot neglect the possible and valuable resources derived from “power-to.” In a patriarchal society where men were granted the power over women, including their right of life and death, do women still have the power to control their own lives? If so, is it possible for women to actualize such “potentiality,”¹⁰ especially in a turbulent age, when the stability of the authority is in doubt? Bearing these key questions in mind, I would like to explore how exceptional women, instead of remaining as silent and passive spectators, attempt to subvert the power positions through their struggles for the right of life and death. Coping

¹⁰ Steven Lukes argues that power “is a potentiality, not actuality—indeed a potentiality that may never be actualized.”

with the national discourse of liberation, they display their power to master their own lives by performing radical actions like suicide and assassination. Meanwhile, they also subvert the power over life and death by breaking the confinement of the “inner sphere” (*nei* 内) and extending their power in a broad “outer sphere” (*wai* 外).

Even though the women figures I choose to discuss have different characteristics, either real historical figures, fictional, or semi-fictional characters, the act of killing—killing self or killing others—became an effective tool and a powerful weapon for them to break from away their usual space, which tends to be a confined inner space. While these women orient their radical killing actions towards the ultimate goals for freedom, liberation, and better lives for women themselves, as well as a higher goal of national salvation, these women bring their struggles for women’s rights and benefits into a broader and more public space. Through their orientation towards the question of life and death, these exceptional women break the boundaries of inner and outer spheres, and become more public actors and participants in the cause for national salvation and women’s liberation.

Chapter Outlines

In this dissertation, I will study three types of exceptional women. Each type demonstrates women’s attitudes, philosophies, and perceptions toward the question of life and death through their radical actions of “killing self” or “killing others (particularly, men)” and their desire to “save self and other women.”

In Chapter One, I explore the modern female martyrdom represented by a Manchurian woman, Hui Xing, who reinterpreted both the concept and the impact of

female suicide in a modern context. By examining various representations of her images, experiences, and stories in newspapers, journal articles, speeches, and a “new play” named *The Story of Lady Hui Xing*, I discuss the complicated factors for Hui Xing’s death and glorification in order to better understand Hui Xing as an exceptional woman whose image represents a feature of Chinese modernity.

During the long historical period of imperial China, female martyrdom was generally associated with the defense or protection of feminine virtue and chastity. In late imperial China, when “women’s potential emotional and moral agency is profoundly associated with, and sometimes made possible by, women’s suicides” (Guo 16), the manifestation of female martyrdom achieved through women’s suicide also connoted new concepts and signification. Women’s suicide, instead of being a passive act that resulted from adversities and abuse, or was conducted to preserve chastity or loyalty within an unjust patriarchal system, was now presented “as a path of independence,” which showed women “as passionate agents of free will” (Zamperini 78).

In the case of Hui Xing, suicide was also a weapon of self-assertion, through which her desire and request could receive proper attention. Like the French female revolutionary Madame Roland, who was portrayed as a distinguish mother figure and a national heroine by late Qing literati, Hui Xing’s image as a national martyr and her radical action of committing suicide were also intertwined with the national discourse of women’s education. Moreover, Hui Xing’s primary intention to free women from confinement (initially for Manchurian women) and seek better lives through promoting women’s education were further complicated by racial tensions. Additionally, as Judge has argued, “At the opposite pole of the regime of feminine virtue were women who

provoked debate, not because of their private devotion to the principles of women's virtue, but because of their alleged public flaunting of those very principles" (59). Because Hui Xing's suicide and her passion for women's education generated broader public and national influence, Hui Xing's death not only contributed to the discourses of national salvation and female emancipation, but also inspired more and more social reevaluation and reinterpretation of traditional feminine virtue.

To further explore the social influence of death and radical actions of "killing," in Chapter Two, I focus on the social and literary representations of radical female revolutionaries who integrate the *xia* spirit of traditional female knights-errant and the modern knowledge and skills of assassins, especially through a close examination of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*. In this chapter, I study the emergence of radical exceptional women and the popularity of the theme of killing/assassinating with the consideration of social and historical background, and explore the radical and violent women images presented in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*. Through these examinations, I discuss how the *xia* spirit transformed into national, and even international spirit, that was embraced by powerful and fearless exceptional women who were widely circulated and developed in the discourse of Chinese modernity with consideration of nationalism and gender.

In traditional Chinese literary representations of *xia* fiction, the theme of *bao* (reciprocity, specifically, taking vengeance or repaying favors) has been regarded as the basic philosophy of maintaining social and moral orders. In late Qing, when national crises became the urgent threat, traditional *xia* spirit was sublimated as national spirit, and *xia* people's practices of punishing evil doers and evil deeds were promoted as necessary actions in defending national benefits and important gestures of "loving the

country.” As the most significant and crucial agents in social change and national salvation, women became the targets who were expected and required to conduct dramatic transformation. Consequently, traditional Chinese radical female figures, such as female knights-errant Nie Yinniang 聶隱娘,¹¹ Hongfu Nü 紅拂女,¹² and Xue Hongxian 薛紅線 or Hongxian Nü 紅線女,¹³ and female soldiers, Hua Mulan 花木兰 and Liang Hongyu 梁紅玉, were promoted as heroic national emblems. With the emergence of modern Chinese female knights-errant, like Qiu Jin, and the introduction of Western radical woman figures, such as Russian nihilist Sophia Perovskaya and French national heroine Joan of Arc, more literary works turned into channels for further circulation of these exceptional women. The adaption and appropriation of these influential women greatly contributed to the shaping of new types of radical Chinese exceptional women.

In the novel, *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, when men cannot save the nation, either because of incompetence or due to turning into traitors and slaves, women, who are dauntless, radical, and revolutionary, take the place of men, and become the master

¹¹ *Nie Yinniang* 聶隱娘 was a short story written by Pei Xing 裴鏘, whose dates of birth and death are unknown, at the end of Tang dynasty. It was first published in *Peixing chuanqi* 裴鏘傳奇. In *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era), a collection of stories was compiled in early Song dynasty by Li Fang 李昉 with imperial approval. *Nie Yinniang* 聶隱娘 was included in volume No. 194, under the category of *Haoxia* 豪俠 (brave knights).

¹² The figure of Hongfu Nü 紅拂女 appeared in *Qiuranke zhuan* 虬髯客傳 (Story of a guy with whiskers), which was written by Du Guangting 杜光庭 in late Tang dynasty. It was also collected in the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (Extensive Records of the Taiping Era).

¹³ *Hongxian Zhuan* 紅線傳 (Story of Hongxian) was written by Yuan Jiao 袁郊, whose dates of birth and death are unknown, in Tang dynasty. It was first published in *Ganze yao* 甘澤謠 (The ballads in Ganze areas).

heroines of the country. Additionally, the author of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* not only refines and elevates the moral concerns of female protagonists by portraying them as the saviors of the nation, but also grants them the power to defend women's authority and rights. Women's power is particularly enhanced by the application of fantastic and futuristic modern weapons and technologies. Through the power of killing and manipulation, women repositioned themselves as dominators in gender relationships, and in the name of salvation, killing is justified as necessary and efficient. Such illustration reveals late Qing male intellectuals' concerns of Chinese men's political impotence; it also conveys their expectation that more women could follow the trend of a changing era and transform themselves like exceptional women.

From Hui Xing's suicide to the radical killing in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, death becomes a form of agency to manifest women's power and rights. But, the action of killing is just a method, and its ultimate goal is for life, and to live better. Therefore, in Chapter Three, my focus moves to the theme of salvation through an analysis of a novel, *Chivalric Beauties*, written by the woman writer Shao Zhenhua. I study the central focus of this novel, which is to expose the darkness of women's sphere and seek ways for women's salvation by women themselves, and analyze women's self-consciousness and self-awareness presented through the women's rights activists and women reformers. In doing so, I discuss how the woman writer, Shao Zhenhua, presents "a tour of women's world" from the female-oriented perspective and how the diverse images of exceptional women express the yearning of women's salvation and liberation within modern concepts.

Women's writing had long existed in China's literary history and had confronted many impediments. But, with many women poets, playwrights, and editors actively

participating in literary activities during the late Ming and early Qing periods, educated gentry women, or talented writers of inner chambers (*guixiu* 閨秀), “transformed the inner chambers into a space of gradual self-empowerment” (Guo 9), which made the existence of the new feminine possible. In late Qing, when women writers could exhibit political and social mobility through their writings, they became more energetic in their participation in the discourse of political reform and social change.

The author of *Chivalric Beauties*, Shao Zhenhua, responds to the historical trend of transformation. Yet, unlike the male reformers and revolutionaries who always advocate for female emancipation within the discourse of nationalism, Shao specifically focuses on women’s affairs in the women’s sphere. In her novel, she depicts a group of women reformers and women’s rights advocates who aim to save women from the “darkness” of the women’s sphere. Through these exceptional women, Shao calls for women’s transformation in order to engender a better modern world for women.

Chivalric Beauties is a novel written by women and for hypothetical women audience, so it is possible to make “women’s experiences of suffering, grievance, and aspirations sharable among an imagined community of women readers” (Guo 4). Moreover, while the author negotiates her life and sense of self through the shaping of exceptional women in this novel, she also intends to help the women readers to learn from the exceptional women who can not only take care of family issues, but also exercise their talent and power as active social beings.

While some scholars tend to more focus on the contents and influences of literary works and materials themselves, it is also important to examine the valuable artistic elements and aesthetic factors associated with literary works. In my examination of all

three types of exceptional women and their attitudes towards life and death, it is clear that the shaping of exceptional women was inseparable from literary genres, both in the way the characters were circulated and the characteristics of the figures themselves. Therefore, I will also explore the application and utilization of “new play” (modern play), “chivalric scientific fiction,” and “semi-autobiography,” respectively in each chapter. The exploration of these literary genres further demonstrates, in line with the struggle for a better and stronger modern nation, both literary figures and the literary instruments were undergoing a transformation that featured the re-evaluation of Chinese tradition and the appropriation of Western influences.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CASE OF HUI XING: FEMALE MARTYRDOM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

On December 21, 1905, a thirty-five year old Manchurian woman, Hui Xing 惠興 (1870-1905), poisoned herself at home and left eight letters to her family, her students, her lady friends, and chief leaders of local government. In her farewell letter, she explained that she wished her death could get support and annual funds for Zhenwen Women's School 貞文女子學校, a private school that she established one year before. About a week later, on December 30th, *Shen Bao* 申報 reported on Hui Xing's suicide with the title, "Lady Hui Xing Sacrificed Herself for Women's Education" (*Hui Xing nüshi wei nüxue xisheng* 惠興女士為女學犧牲). This report briefly introduced Hui Xing and her perseverance in establishing the women's school until her heroic death. Soon after the publication of this report, Hui Xing's story gained widespread attention in China, initiated by advocates of women's education and rights in Beijing and Taijin. Memorials and mourning activities were also conducted nationwide, and Hui Xing was regarded as an exceptional woman and a modern martyr who contributed to national salvation.

For thousands of years, female martyrdom (*xun* 殉) had been valued as a moral virtue since it represented women's determination and devotion along with a glorious

death. However, in traditional norms and codes, such glory was usually granted to female martyrs only if they died while protecting their chastity (in most cases) or in devotion to the state/country (in some cases). So, how did a woman who killed herself for the sake of getting funding for a women's school become a martyr? In order to answer this, we must explore the reasons behind her death and how Hui Xing's action was associated with the discourse of national salvation. Could the narratives and rhetoric of female martyrdom even imply the change and transformation of Chinese society?

With these questions in mind, in this chapter, I will focus on the various representations of Hui Xing's images, experiences, and stories in newspapers, journal articles, speeches, and a "new play" (*xinxi* 新戲) named *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* (*Hui Xing nüshi zhuan* 惠興女士傳). These materials presented how, within a period of less than a year, Hui Xing changed from an enthusiastic lady who was passionate to establish a women's school, to a desperate martyr who had to give up her life in order to make her request for annual funds. These images of Hui Xing ultimately reflected the new integration of China's tradition and the incoming modernity. Further more, the conflicts and possible reasons behind Hui Xing's death and her glorification were complicated by larger historical and social backgrounds.

Hui Xing's radical action of committing suicide was triggered by the financial crisis, but more complicated factors led up to her death. Like the French revolutionary, Madam Roland (1754-1793), who was portrayed as a female martyr by Chinese literati, Hui Xing also inspired new interpretations of female martyrdom through the act of killing. Her attitude towards death, in struggling for her desires, further represented her as a female martyr in a modern context. Moreover, instead of obeying patriarchal concepts of

loyalty, Hui Xing exerted all her energy, including her death, to request attention and get funds for her school, and to protest against the racial and moral confinement of women. Hui Xing reinterpreted the concept of martyrdom in modernity by taking control of her own death in a more significant and self-conscious way. Hui Xing's death and her sacrifice to women's education were further enhanced within the discourse of national salvation, and complicated by other aspects, such as the racial tension. While Hui Xing's death was intended for Manchurian women's education and emancipation, her story was eventually reconfigured in narratives of national salvation. Thus her death did not only address women's struggles, but also reached a wider discourse than she intended. Her goals for Manchurian women to be educated and enlightened were at times overshadowed by national salvation; nonetheless, Hui Xing is always remembered as a different kind of female martyr who represents a new type of exceptional woman. By shaping Hui Xing as an exceptional woman and a new model of female martyrdom, nationalists, reformists, and feminists conveyed their diverse responses to the social changes and transformations.

Hui Xing's Story and the Complexity on Her Death and Her Glory

Hui Xing's name can be found in quite a few materials, not only in the newspapers and magazines of her time, such as *Shenbao* 申報, *Da Gong Bao* 大公報, *Shuntian shibao* 順天時報, and *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌, but also in later historical and documentary references, such as *Draft History of the Qing Dynasty* (*Qingshigao* 清史稿) (1927), *Historical Materials on Women's Rights Movements in Modern China 1842-1911* (*Jindai zhongguo nüquan yundong shiliao* 近代中國女權運動史料) (1975), *Women's*

Movement in China 1840-1921 (Zhongguo funü yundong 中國婦女運動) (1990), and *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women 1644-1911 (Zhongguo funü zhuanji cidian 中國婦女傳記辭典)* (2010). Although in all these materials, the story of Hui Xing's establishment of the Zhenwen Women's School was recorded, either briefly or in detail, a close study on the differences between these versions reveals that there were complicated factors, such as racial tension, gender conflicts, the significant impact of martyrdom, and the influence of nationalist discourse, that influenced both Hui Xing's death and her glory.

The article "Lady Hui Xing Sacrificed Herself for Women's Education" published in *Shenbao* on Dec. 30th 1905, was the first to introduce Hui Xing's story. Therefore, I would like to use it as the basis of comparison. The article states:

Lady Hui Xing from Hangzhou was the daughter of deceased co-leader (of Hangzhou City) Pu, and the wife of scholar Jishan. Hui Xing's husband passed away when she was nineteen years old. She did not remarry and preserved chastity since then. Enlightened by Nanpi's¹ *Exhortation to Study (Quan Xue 勸學)*, Hui Xing called for promoting women's education by women themselves. June 26th of the thirtieth year of Guang Xu's reign,² Hui Xing assembled many famous local people to discuss establishing a women's school. On that day, Hui Xing suddenly exposed one of her arms in front of all the people and cut a piece of flesh from it. She swore: "Today is the day when Hang Zhou Manchurian Women's

¹ Nanpi 南皮 refers to 張之洞 Zhang Zhidong. He was called Zhang Nanpi because his hometown is Nanpi County in Hebei province.

² The thirtieth year of Guang Xu's reign referred to the year of 1904.

School is established. I would like to celebrate it with my blood. If the school has to be closed one day, I will die with it.” The school officially opened on September 16th, but the funding for this school was very limited. Hangzhou Chief General De, besides donating 40 *yuan* personally, allocated 80 *yuan* from government funds. The Student Association of Eight Bannerman in Japan donated 100 *yuan*, attendant of Commander-in-Chief Duan Wu delightedly donated 50 *yuan*, and some Eight Banner officials donated 8 or 10 *yuan*. Together with other petty donations, it was only a little more than 300 *yuan* in total. Because the school lacked consistent funding, it was very difficult to maintain operation. The classes were interrupted several times since the fall of the first school year due to a shortage of money. Hui Xing was extremely worried about the future of this school because it was too difficult to request funds from the government. With great determination to get the funds, Hui Xing wrote eight letters and hid them in her desk. She also wrote a petition with itemized bills of operational expenses. Hui Xing planned to go to the court to present the petition personally after she imbibed poison. However, her family found that she looked strange before she went out, and soon discovered the trace of opium in her teacup. Shocked and astonished, they hurriedly tried their utmost to rescue her. However, it was too late to save her. Before Hui Xing lost her last breath, she tried her best to open her eyes and said: “Present this petition to the officials. We can get long-term funds from now on.” Hui Xing died at the age of thirty-five, on November

25th of the thirty-first year of Guang Xu reign.

The article in *Shenbao* illustrated Hui Xing as a strong-willed woman who was determined to run a school for women until she sacrificed her life. It also briefly narrated how Hui Xing operated Zhenwen Women's School with great difficulties. Particularly, it emphasized the lack of financial support. It seems that the obvious reason for Hui Xing's suicide was the lack of financial support for the operation of the school. But what deserves more attention is, was seeking funds for the school the only reason for her death? The examination of more materials hint that there were more issues involved in Hui Xing's death.

Gui Lin 貴林, the co-commander of the garrison division in Hangzhou City and the chief-officer on affairs of Hui Xing Women's School (former Zhenwen Women's School), in his address in 1907, directly revealed the reasons for Hui Xing's death: "one, it was really difficult to collect the promised donations; two, Hui Xing's colleagues and friends shirked their responsibilities; and three, it was so discouraging to be sneered at by insiders (*neibu* 內部) and slandered by outsiders (*waibu* 外部)." Gui Lin's claim pointed out that, in the process of operating her school, Hui Xing suffered from a lack of support, not only financially, but also mentally. Materials on these difficulties in the process of establishing and operating the school could be found in almost every article on her story. In the elegiac article written by Hui Xing's son Jin Xian 金賢, Jin even used the phrase "to destroy one's family" (*huijia* 毀家) (to offer all one has) to describe Hui Xing's determination to operate her school. In the "Supplementary Statement to the History of the Exceptional Woman Hui Xing, the Principal of Hangzhou Zhenwen Women's School" 補記杭州貞文女學校校長惠興女傑歷史 published by *Shuntian Shibao* on Feb.

8th 1906, it stated, when Hui Xing decided to run the women's school, she did her utmost to persuade her female friends in order to collect funds. Moreover, in Hui Xing's farewell letter, she started with a sense of grievance:

To be the person to initiate a school is not easy. I know that I am weak and incompetent, so my original intention was to encourage competent people, such as Ms. San, Ms. Senior Feng, Ms. Bai, and Ms. Zhe, and hope that they can undertake the magnanimous act with a warm heart. Who knows! These women all blamed me, and thought that I am a meddling woman.³

Hui Xing narrated her sad experience in persuading her female friends to either support her or work with her. Hui Xing's female friends' disapproval of Hui Xing's idea implied their uncertainty and doubts towards the possibility of establishing a women's school. Their blame for Hui Xing's meddlingness also suggested the negative impact of the Doctrine of the Mean (*Zhongyong zhidao* 中庸之道), that is, the less trouble the better. If even Hui Xing's women friends, these possible "insiders," could not understand or assist her, then how could Hui Xing receive reliable support from "outsiders"? No wonder it was difficult to acquire funding, especially because even those who had promised to donate could change their minds.

Additionally, Hui Xing's personal life was arduous. Being a widow at a young age, she had to take care of her mother-in-law and raise her son alone. Thus, when she

³ "Hangzhou Zhenwen nüxuexiao xiaozhang Hui Xing nüshi juemeng yi zhong xuesheng shu" 杭州貞文女學校校長惠興女士絕命遺眾學生書 (The farewell letter of Hui Xing, the principal of Hangzhou Zhenwen Women's School, to her Students) was published in the first issue of *Hui Xing nüxuebao* 惠興女學報 (Hui Xing women's education newspaper), in May 1908.

was finally determined to do something that could benefit women, she had to overcome all of these troubles—not only the financial, moral, and emotional burden of operating the school, but also the problems in her personal life. To address my previous question, it seems that Hui Xing’s death was influenced by more than just the issue of finances. Her diverse emotions, including passion, disappointment, and frustrations in the process of establishing her school, combined with her strong will and indomitable spirit, pushed her to take radical actions. On the one hand, these difficulties seemed to have made Hui Xing’s life miserable, but on the other hand, it was these very factors that make Hui Xing a strong figure. Despite her troubles, it was because of her dauntless sacrifice in promoting women’s education that Hui Xing attracted public attention, and more and more public media began to interpret Hui Xing’s social identity and influences, often times, in the form of commentaries (*pingyi* 評議).

The commentary was a popular practice at that time, and in the commentaries, the author would publish their interpretations of figures, like Hui Xing, as well as how they expected the public to understand these figures. Although the article in *Shenbao* did not have any commentaries, articles published in other newspapers or magazines, all explicitly contained the authors’ commentaries on Hui Xing and her heroic actions. However, these authors presented different views of praise. While some commended Hui Xing for her “enthusiasm and determination for promoting women’s education” (*shizhi yingxue* 矢志興學), others focused on her “chivalric spirit” (*yixia zhiqi* 義俠之氣), which was represented through her radical actions, such as cutting her flesh and even dying for her school. In terms of Hui Xing’s radical actions, one interesting thing is, in the *Draft History of the Qing Dynasty*, the plot of “cutting her flesh” was recorded as proof for Hui

Xing's filial piety to her mother-in-law when she followed the traditional women's virtue and tried "to cure an ill person with the flesh" (*gegu liaoji* 割股療疾). In fact, Hui Xing did "try to cure her ill mother-in-law with her flesh" 嘗割肱療姑疾. In the elegiac article written by Hui Xing's son Jin Xian published in 1912, Jin Xian mentioned how Hui Xing took good care of his grandmother and cured the latter with her flesh.⁴ In many stories of filial exemplars, "to cure an ill person with one's flesh" is regarded as a sincere proof of filial piety or loyalty. So it seems that the authors/editors of the *Draft History of the Qing Dynasty* cared more about how Hui Xing's radical conduct presented traditional women's virtue. However, Hui Xing's radical action of "cutting her flesh" signified more than that, because she also "cut a piece of flesh from her arm to prove her point" (*gerou weizheng* 割肉為證). Whether the *Draft History of the Qing Dynasty* acknowledged it or not, Hui Xing manipulated this traditional radical action as a method to demonstrate her dedication to the school and the women she wanted to help. Through her act, she demonstrated the same level of loyalty, but subverted the traditional act by dedicating it not only to her family, but also to the school. To further fulfill her promise, Hui Xing also employed the traditional chaste women's practice. But instead of "dying for her husband" (*xunfu* 殉夫) she "died for promoting education" (*xunxue* 殉學). I will further discuss how Hui Xing's radical actions make her a unique or different female martyr in a later section. To better explore this point, it is important to note the similarities between Hui Xing and Madame Roland, another popular female martyr at that time in China.

The introduction of Madame Roland to China can be traced to the travel journal

⁴ This elegiac article is collected in a thin collection named *Hui Xing nüshi huiwen shilüe* 惠興女士徽文事略 (The panegyric to lady Hui Xing), which was stored in the Ancient Books Collection of National Library of China.

of Kang Youwei 康有為 when he traveled in Europe, but it was Liang Qichao 梁啟超 who first lauded Madame Roland as “the foremost exceptional woman in modern time,” and turned the image of Madame Roland into a significant trope of a modern political heroine. In October 1902, Liang wrote an article, “The Biography of Madame Roland—the Foremost Exceptional Woman in Modern Time” (*Jinshi diyi nüjie luolan furen zhuan* 近世第一女傑羅蘭夫人傳) and published it in the 17th and 18th issues of *Xinmin congbao* 新民叢報 (New Citizens) under the pen name “a new citizen of China” (*Zhongguo zhi xinmin* 中國之新民). In this biography, Liang used the style of “a biography combined with commentary from the author” (*pingyi zhuanji* 評議傳記) to portray Madame Roland as a heroic woman who died for pursuing freedom and the course of saving her country. Liang especially praised Madame Roland as the “Mother of the French Revolution,”⁵ and by melding together “an implicit appeal to the traditional Chinese veneration of the Mother and the explicit emphasis on the intimate link between this Mother figure and the very modernity of European,” Liang made the image of Madame Roland “palatable to the would-be new citizens of modern China” (Hu, *Tales of Translation* 173). As Xia Xiaohong argues, Liang’s version of Madame Roland set up a great example for Chinese women to connect their fates with the nation, and in doing so, they could struggle for liberation dauntlessly when China was in a kind of darkness (*Late*

⁵ Liang’s article began with the famous comments: “Who is Madame Roland? She was born for freedom, and she died for freedom. Who is Madame Roland? Freedom was born of her, and she died because of freedom. Who is Madame Roland? She is the mother of Napoleon, the mother of Metternich, the mother of Mazzini, the mother of Kossuth, the mother of Bismarck, and the mother of Cavour. In short, all great men of nineteenth-century Europe must regard her as a mother; all civilizations of nineteenth-century Europe must regard her as a mother. Why is this so? Because the French Revolution is the mother of nineteenth-century Europe, and Madame Roland is the mother of the French Revolution.”

Qing Women... 197-203). So Liang's portrayal of Madame Roland soon became a classic representation of Madam Roland and circulated in many newspapers and magazines.

Of course, Liang's version was not the only one.⁶ As Hu Ying has argued, "Madame Roland is constructed in relation to the domestic politics of the time, and out of the conventions of various literary genres that portrayed her" (*Tales of Translation* 172). Therefore, when "saving the nation from subjugation" (*jiuwang tuchun* 救亡圖存) became the national consensus, Madame Roland gained wide respect as an enlightened, independent female. In addition, after continuous shaping, circulation, and interpretation, Madame Roland became a meaningful symbol, which appeared in many narratives as a model. However, because of the different views on how to achieve China's modernity, even the same iconic image may present different features. The radical democrats focused on Madame Roland's influential performance in the turbulent French revolution, and regarded her as "a heroic revolutionary" (Jin Yi 金一). Reformers who supported the

⁶ Liang's Madame Roland was based on the Japanese book *Exceptional Women of the World* written by Japanese scholars Iwasaki Sodou 岩崎徂堂. Among many western women introduced in this book, Madame Roland was called "The Flower of French Revolution." This Japanese book was translated into Chinese with the title *Shijie shi'er nüjie* 世界十二女傑 (The Twelve World Exceptional Women) by Zhao Bizhen 趙必振 in February 1903. Because the theme of the whole book was to teach women about the importance of self-help, in Zhao's book, Madame Roland was mostly praised as a determined woman who presented extreme calm when she faced her death. In the same year, female elite Xue Shaohui 薛紹徽, with the help of her husband Chen Shoupeng 陳壽彭, also published a collection of the *Waiguo lienü zhuan* 外國列女傳 (Biographies of World Exceptional Women), which also included Madame Roland. It was still unclear where Xue found the sources for Madame Roland's story. Different from Liang and Zhao, the image of Madame Roland under Xue's portrait was nothing but a devoted wife who not only loved learning but also displayed excellent political ability that helped her husband in his political career. There was also a *tanci* version of Madame Roland's story in 1904, in which the figure of Madame Roland is saturated with the conventions of popular romance. Besides being the protagonist in these works, the image of Madame Roland also circulated in newspapers, journals, and plenty of literary works.

constitutional monarchy, cared more about Madame Roland's great thoughts and efforts to save the country from the violent dictatorship, so they particularly praised her for her passionate patriotism (Liang Qichao). For Chinese women who aimed to fight for the equal rights between men and women, Madame Roland symbolized women's independence and freedom. As it was written in "The School Motto of Xiangshan Women's School" (*Xiangshan nüxuexiao xueyue* 香山女學校學約), article one, "Men and women deserve equal rights, which is a universal principle and must be known. ... You can enjoy all the natural rights, and you should also fulfill all the human responsibilities. You should try to become the exceptional women of the world, and not degenerated into slaves again. Look at Madame Roland and Joan of Arc. If you are talented and capable, why not become women like them?"⁷ Despite the different emphases of Madame Roland's characteristics, one thing these interpretations had in common was her devotion and sacrifice for national salvation, which can also be applied to the case of Hui Xing.

Both the stories of Hui Xing and Madame Roland with various representations were circulated in the media almost at the same time. Despite their differences in primary purposes, they were both interpreted as political women figures who struggled for higher level of goals. By explicitly comparing Hui Xing to a well-known figure, Madame Roland, intellectuals linked Hui Xing to a wider concept of national salvation, rather than just women's education. In addition, some intellectuals also compared Hui Xing to Madame Roland in terms that they gave up personal interests for public benefits. On

⁷ "Xiangshan nüxuexiao xueyue" 香山女學校學約 (The School Motto of Xiangshan Women's School) was published in *Nüzi shijie* 女子世界 (Women's World), issue 7, in July 1904.

March 14th 1906, *Da Gong Bao* published an article “On Exceptional Woman Hui Xing’s Death for Education” (*Ji Hui Xing nüjie weixue xunshen shi* 記惠興女傑為學殉身事) written by San Duo 三多, the general officer of Zhejiang Military Academy. San Duo commented:

The women’s education in China has been undeveloped for a really long period of time. Among mediocre women, the outstanding ones are talented women (*cainü* 才女), wise mothers (*xianmu* 賢母), or rigorously chaste women (*jieliefu* 節烈婦), and people regard them as the most accomplished women. However, no one can compare to Madame Roland, a true figure who selflessly devotes herself to her fellow countrymen and thinks about her future generations with no personal considerations (*siqing* 私情) or selfish desires (*siyu* 私慾). If there is one in China, the first one should be the distinguished lady Hui Xing from Tongli.

In this commentary, San Duo not only compared Hui Xing with “the most accomplished women”—talented women, wise mothers, and rigorously chaste women—in Chinese tradition, but also compared her to the French exceptional woman—Madame Roland. These comparisons further demonstrated that Hui Xing represented a new type of womanhood that appropriated both the features of traditional Chinese exemplary women and the characteristics of modern Western heroines. Moreover, besides praising Hui Xing’s devotion for the nation and “her fellow countrymen” like Madame Roland, San Duo also highlighted their morality of “getting rid of personal considerations and selfish desires” 絕私情, 滅私慾. Such commentary was inseparable from the gradually popularized concept of “public morality” (*gongde* 公德), which was first introduced by

Liang Qichao in 1902. In the “Regulations for *the New Citizen*” (*Xinmincong bao zhangcheng* 新民叢報章程) published on Feb. 8th, 1902, Liang first defined the concept of “public morality” from the perspective of the relationship between an individual and social benefits. In Liang’s argument, “public morality” referred to the characteristics that existed in personal behaviors and could have significant public influences. In the time when China was under national crises, this “public morality” related more to the behaviors or practices that benefited the country and society. In Liang’s own words, it meant “a patriotic heart” (*aiguo xin* 愛國心), “a public heart” (*gonggong xin* 公共心), or “a heart for common good” (*gongyi xin* 公益心); it also referred to as “national morality” (*guojia lunli* 國家倫理) and “social morality” (*shehui lunli* 社會倫理). The national and social concept of “public morality” became an important standard when literati were promoting nationalism. Because of this, terms related to “private, personal, or individual interests” were gradually considered obstacles to overcome in order to fulfill the obligations to the country and society. San Duo’s commendation of Hui Xing for “getting rid of personal considerations and selfish desires” is a good example of such interpretation, and a reflection of the public opinion at that time.

But this raises the question: while praising “public morality,” is it appropriate to neglect “personal considerations”? In the case of Hui Xing, did her “personal considerations” influence her actions? In fact, it was because Hui Xing extended her “personal considerations” into a broader consideration of other women that she decided to establish a school for women. This is evident from the illustration in the article published by *Shuntian Shibao* on Feb. 8th 1906. Hui Xing became a widow at the age of nineteen, so the hardship of raising her son alone could not be expressed in a few words

辛苦艱辛, 一言難盡. Despite the hardship of her own life, Hui Xing still desired to “do a great thing with vigorousness in China’s women’s sphere” 打算轟轟烈烈的, 在中國女界中, 做一番事業. When Hui Xing decided to establish a women’s school, she named the school “Zhenwen” 貞文, because *zhen* 貞 meant “chastity, virtue” in the phrase *zhenjie* 貞潔, and *wen* 文 connoted the hope of “civilization” *wenming* 文明. Hui Xing wished that through education, her school could free women from confinement, and help them enjoy happy, modern lives. Being a chaste woman when she was still a young lady, Hui Xing was fully aware of the negative influences of traditional orthodoxy to Chinese women, so she transformed her desires for a better future into the establishment of a school for other women. It was her personal experiences and considerations that motivated her to “do a great thing” for other women. In addition, *Draft History of the Qing Dynasty* cited Hui Xing’s last words: “You can still hear the voices of wild geese even when they are gone. One should leave a good reputation after his/her death. I am not willing to die, but I have to!” 雁過留聲, 人過留名. 我非樂死, 不得已耳! It seems that, Hui Xing also had a “selfish motive” to establish the school; that is, to “leave a good reputation of herself.” However, her “selfishness” is not an obstacle or in opposition to “public interests.” Rather, it became another impetus for Hui Xing’s actions, even radical conceptions. So in the case of Hui Xing, “personal considerations” actually contributed to her sacrifices both for her and the public benefits, or in other words, the presentation of “public morality.” Through her “selfish act,” for her and for other women, Hui Xing challenged but also portrayed the idea of “public morality.” But, the question is, how was Hui Xing’s death was sublimated into a national sacrifice comparable to someone like Madame Roland? To better understand this question and modern female martyrdom at

that time, I would like to further explore the concept of martyrdom and the transformation of female martyrdom at late Qing.

Hui Xing's Death and the Changing Concept of Martyrdom (*xun* 殉)

In ancient China, martyrdom (*xun* 殉) played a significant role in denoting the power of the sovereign. As Michel Foucault has argued, the old sovereign power had the authority and “power of life and death.” He claims, “For a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death,” in that the sovereign power could decide whether or not someone would be killed (“Right of Death and Power Over Life” 135). Through a form of “deduction,” the sovereign had the power to take things, including property, privileges and life, away from its subjects.

In China, the emperor or the lord not only exhibited his power over life by controlling people's “right of life,” but also by deciding how many people would die with him in his funeral. Since the Shang dynasty (c. 1600-1046 BCE), to bury people (in most situations, to bury people alive) with the dead became a significant part of the funeral ceremony. In fact, according to *Kangxi Dictionary* (*Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典),⁸ the original meaning of *xun* 殉 is “to send people to die” 用人送死也 as in the expression “to be buried alive with the dead” (*xunzang* 殉葬) (580). All the sacrifices (*xunzangzhe* 殉葬者) were chosen to accompany and serve the dead in the immortal world, and they were regarded as “honorable and loyal martyrs.” The quantity of sacrifices was also a symbol

⁸ *Kangxi Dictionary* (*Kangxi Zidian* 康熙字典) was compiled by Zhang Yushu 張玉書 and Chen Tingjing 陳廷敬 by the order of Qing Emperor Kangxi 康熙 in 1701. It was published in 1706 and regarded as the standard dictionary in 18th and 19th century since then. The version I used as reference was reprinted by Zhonghua Shuju 中華書局.

of power and social status. In *Mozi • Simplicity in Funeral* (Mozi • *jieyang* 墨子 • 節葬), it says, “When the emperor dies, hundreds or at least dozens of people were buried with him. If a general or an official dies, dozens or at least a handful of people were buried with him.” Mozi described such a ritual as an action of “killing sacrifices” (*shaxun* 殺殉), which not only pointed out the cruelty of this practice, but also implied the passiveness and helplessness of the sacrifices.

Because one Confucian ethic doctrine promotes “the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues” (*sangang wuchang* 三綱五常),⁹ it was the duty and obligation of common people and officials to obey orders from the rulers and to sacrifice themselves for the rulers. As such, the sovereign power over life and death was enhanced by moral education. But while Confucian scholars highly valued loyalty and fidelity from the subjects, they also advised the emperors or the lords to be “wise rulers” (*mingjun* 明君) and to be benevolent and righteous. Therefore, in facing the ferocity of sacrificial burial, many scholars, such as Mencius, criticized this kind of martyrdom and tried to persuade the emperors to abandon it.¹⁰ In *Book of Rites • Tangong* (*Liji • Tangong* 禮記 • 檀弓), Zikang 子亢 also says, “to bury people alive is not a proper behavior” 以殉葬非禮也.

⁹ “The three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues” was proposed by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 in his book *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (The Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals) in the 4th century. The three cardinal guides are: the ruler guides his subject (*jun wei chen gang* 君為臣綱), the father guides his son (*fu wei zi gang* 父為子綱), and the husband guides his wife (*fu wei qi gang* 夫為妻綱). The five constant virtues are: benevolence (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), propriety (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), and fidelity (*xin* 信).

¹⁰ In “Simplicity in Funerals,” Mozi argues that elaborate funerals and extended mourning are neither magnanimous nor righteous, and the custom of having people die to accompany their lord is part of this habit. Therefore, the magnanimous emperors should seek to have this kind of elaborate funeral abolished, to have the people condemn it, and never to practice it in their whole life.

Not only scholars, but also common people expressed their rejection and accusation towards the sacrificial burial in some literary works, as it was reflected in the poem *Yellow Birds* (*huangniao* 黃鳥).^{11 12}

Along with the denouncement of the inhuman martyrdom for the dead in sacrificial burial, another concept of *xun* 殉, “to die for certain purposes” (*Ancient Chinese Dictionary* 1796-7) became more valuable. People began to highly promote martyrdom for more meaningful and significant reasons, such as “to sacrifice oneself for the kingdom or the country” (*xunguo* 殉國) or “to die for pursuing fame” (*xunming* 殉名). In *Twenty-four Histories • Book of Song* (*Ershisi shi • Songshu* 二十四史 • 宋書), there was a biography on the famous general Shen Wenxiu 沈文秀. When Shen Wenxiu refused to leave his wounded brother behind in a battle, his brother said, “A great man should die on the battlefield and sacrifice himself for the country (*yishen xunguo* 以身殉國). How can he be confined by feelings towards family members?” Zhuangzi also claims in *Zhuangzi • Webbed Toes* (*Zhuangzi • pianmu* 莊子駢拇篇), that, “Petty men sacrifice themselves for the sake of gain; scholars and knights sacrifice themselves for the sake of fame; great officers sacrifice themselves for the sake of their families; and sages sacrifice themselves for the sake of the world” 小人則以身殉利, 士則以身殉名, 大夫則

¹¹ When the King of Qing Kingdom Qin Mugong 秦穆公 whose name was Qin Renhao 秦好任 died, the three sons of the Che 車 family were buried with him as sacrifices. These three persons were all virtuous gentlemen, so the people all grieved for them. As evidenced by a poem named *Yellow Birds*, which conveyed their sorrow and implicitly accused the ruthlessness of Qin Mugong. This story was written in *Zuozhuan • Wen liünian* 左傳 • 文六年 (Commentary of Zuo • Wen liünian). The poem *Yellow Birds* was collected in *Shijing • Guofeng • Qinfeng* 詩經 • 國風 • 秦風 (The Classic of Odes • Airs of the States • Odes of Qin).

¹² The two pieces from the *Book of Rites* and the *Commentary of Zuo* are used as examples for the explanation of *xun* 殉 in *Kangxi Dictionary*.

以身殉家, 聖人則以身殉天下. In short, men should sacrifice in order to achieve “three immortal deeds” (*san buxiu* 三不朽)—“establishing virtue (*lide* 立德), establishing successful service (*ligong* 立功), and establishing speech (*liyan* 立言)”¹³

In contrast to Chinese men, who can make a name by “three immortal deeds,” Chinese women were often remembered by “chastity” (*zhenlie* 貞烈). One reason for this result was caused by the patriarchal power system. Within this system, women were generally treated as the property of men, and the power over the “right of death” for women was generally executed through masculine power. Women’s social lives and personal behaviors were strictly regulated based on “the three obedience and four virtues” (*sancong side* 三從四德), so they were educated and eulogized by the orthodox concepts of “sacrificing for the husband” (*xunfu* 殉夫) or “to die for preserving chastity” (*xunjie* 殉節). Examples of such women can be found in many classical textbooks for women’s morality. In *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienü zhuan* 列女傳),¹⁴ for example, Yue Ji 越姬, the wife of King Zhao of Chu Kingdom was praised as a good example of a “chaste woman” (*lienü* 烈女). After King Zhao died, in order to fulfill her promises of always accompanying King Zhao, Yue Ji committed suicide right after King Zhao’s

¹³ *San buxiu* 三不朽 (three things that are not decaying or three immortal deeds) was first appeared in *Chunqiu zuoshi zhuan* 春秋左氏傳 (Commentary to Chunqiu Zuo zhuan). It was put forward by Shu Sunbao from Lu Kingdom 魯國叔公豹, and became a very influential philosophy since then.

¹⁴ *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 (Biographies of Exemplary Women) was compiled by Confucian scholar Liu Xiang 劉向 (79-8 BCE) in the Han dynasty. Since then, it has served as a standard textbook for moral education of women for centuries. In this book, one hundred and twenty-five biographical accounts of virtuous and vicious women from ancient texts are divided into seven categories, including matronly deportment, sagacious clarity, benevolent wisdom, chaste obedience, pure righteousness, rhetorical competence, and depraved favoritism.

death. Besides promoting exemplary chaste women, Confucian orthodoxy also extols “chastity” as the highest virtue of a woman. As it is reflected by the famous saying of Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), one of the most influential Neo-Confucian scholar, “Death by starvation is preferable to loss of chastity” 餓死事極小, 失節事極大.¹⁵ The concept of women’s chastity was also highlighted in moral textbooks for women. In the chapter on “chastity” (*zhenlie* 貞烈) of *Sketch of a Model for Women* (*Nüfan jielu* 女范捷錄),¹⁶ it says “chastity means to preserve moral integrity unswervingly, and heroism means to sacrifice one’s life without hesitation” 艱難苦節謂之貞, 慷慨捐生謂之烈. Wang Xiang interprets that “a woman who overcomes great troubles to be a devoted widow after her husband’s death is called a chaste woman. She does not yield to difficulties, never surrender to threats, and would rather die to defend her honor. Such a wife is a virtuous woman. Such a lady is a virtuous lady” 女子喪夫苦守, 是為貞潔. 遇難不屈, 威逼不從, 寧死不辱, 婦曰烈婦, 女曰烈女. Wang Xiang’s understandings of women’s moral

¹⁵ See *Posthumous Writings of Cheng* (*Chengshi yishu* 程氏遺書), Volume 22.

¹⁶ *Nüfan jielu* 女范捷錄 (*Sketch of a Model for Women*) was written by Lady Liu 劉夫人. She was the mother of Wang Xiang 王相 who edited and commented *女四書* (*The Four Books for Women*) in 1624. The full Chinese name for the collection of *Nü sishu* is *Guige nüsisishu jizhu* 閨閣女四書集註 (*The Collection of Four Books for Ladies in the Boudoir*), but it was generally called *nüsisishu* 女四書 as a comparison to *Sishu* 四書 (*The Four Books*)—*Daxue* 大學 (*The Great Learning*), *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*The Doctrine of the Mean*), *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*), and *Mengzi* 孟子 (*Mencius*), which were generally used as the textbooks for men. *The Four Books for Women* were all written by women, and they include *Nüjie* 女誡 (*Admonitions for Women*) by Ban Zhao 班昭 in the Han period (206 BCE–220 CE), *Nü lunyu* 女論語 (*The Analects on Women*) by Song Ruoshen 宋若莘 and her sister Song Ruozhao 宋若昭 in the Zhenyuan period 貞元 (785–805) of the Tang dynasty, *Nüfan jielu* 女范捷錄 (*Sketch of a Model for Women*) by Lady Liu 劉夫人, and *Neixun* 內訓 (*Domestic Lessons*) by Empress Xu 徐妙心, who was the Queen of Ming Emperor Zhu Di 朱棣. The last two were both written in the Ming period (1368–1644).

integrity are confined within the family structure. For centuries, without an independent identity, a woman is only recognized as a shadow of her father, her husband, or her sons. Her right of life and death was usually under the control of masculine power. Under the influence of such understandings, female martyrdom was generally promoted or understood through 烈女 *lienü* (women martyrs), or women who died defending their family's honor as well as protecting their chastity or virtue.

It was not until the late nineteenth century that the concept of martyrdom (*xun* 殉) was further developed by reformers and revolutionaries. When facing national crises and struggling for solutions to “save” China, they began to advocate sacrifices for the nation in more specific ways. They emphasized the significance of “dying for certain beliefs,” such as “sacrificing for the movement of reform” (*xun bianfa* 殉變法) like Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865-1898),¹⁷ and “sacrificing for revolution” (*xun geming* 殉革命) like Chen Tianhua 陳天華 (1875-1905).¹⁸ Because of martyrs like these, the relationship between

¹⁷ Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 was regarded as one of the most influential politicians, thinkers and reformists in modern Chinese history. He was appointed to the Grand Council in 1898 soon after he met Emperor Guangxu 光緒, who admired Tan for his righteousness, talents and insights in propelling China to a modern nation through reform. On June 11th, 1898, Emperor Guangxu approved the new policies proposed by Tan and his fellow reform-minded supporters. However, the new policies greatly threatened the interests of many government officials and Manchu noblemen. On September 21st, conservative Empress Dowager Cixi staged a coup d'état. She put Emperor Guangxu under house arrest within the Forbidden City. She also publicly executed six of the chief reform advocates, including Tan Sitong. The year of 1898 was *Wuxu year* 戊戌年 according to Chinese chronology, so this movement was called “Wuxu Reform Movement” (*wuxu bianfa* 戊戌變法). Because this reform movement lasted only for 103 days, it was called the “Hundred Days’ Reform” (*Bairi weixin* 百日維新). The six executed reformist were called “Six Gentlemen” (*Wuxu liujuzi* 戊戌六君子).

¹⁸ Chen Tianhua 陳天華 was regarded as a Chinese revolutionary because of his influential works such as two pamphlets: *A Sudden Look Back* (*Menghuitou* 猛回頭) and *An Alarm to Awaken the Age* (*Jingshi zhong* 警世鐘), which were popular among

martyrdom, sacrifice, and the fate of the nation changed dramatically. In addition, the traditional idea of “sacrificing for the world” was further transformed into “sacrificing for the country” and promoted as a “social responsibility.” In his article, “To be Immoral is My Religion” (*Buxiu—wode zongjiao* 不朽—我的宗教), Hu Shih 胡適 points out the deficiencies of the “three immortal deeds.” Hu Shih argues, although the philosophy of “three immortal deeds” is pragmatic, it limits the practice of “immortal deeds” to the minority immortals only. In addition, while it promotes goodness, it does not restrain evilness. Therefore, Hu Shih proposes the theory of “the immortal of a society” (*Shehui buxiu lun* 社會不朽論), which emphasizes that the “small self” (*xiaowo* 小我) should be responsible for the “greater self” (*dawo* 大我). In other words, individuals should fulfill their social responsibilities regardless of status, social positions, wealth, or brightness. Hu Shih’s theory pinpoints the close connection between individuals and the society; it also highlights the social influences that individuals can bring, which turns the philosophy of “three immortal deeds” from a spiritual belief to a social belief. With such transformation

revolutionaries. He was also an editor of the newspaper called *The Citizens’ Daily* (*Min Bao* 民報) and wrote a novel called *The Lion’s Roar* (*Shizi hou* 獅子吼). In addition, he was very active in many political organizations, including the Chinese United League (Tongmen Hui 同盟會), which was the organization mainly responsible for leading the 1911 Revolution against the Qing Dynasty. Chen went to Japan for study in 1903. In 1904, Chen returned to China. Together with his fellow revolutionaries Huang Xing 黃興 and Song Jiaoren 宋教仁, Chen founded an underground revolutionary society called China Arise Society (Huaxing Hui 華興會) in Changsha, Hunan province. However, he had to escape to Japan after a failed uprising against the Qing government. While he was in Japan, in October 1905, Japanese government issued a regulation that imposed very strict restrictions on the activities of Chinese students. Although some Chinese students like Chen organized a protest against this discrimination, they failed to stop the implementation of this unfair regulation. Through this incident, Chen also realized that many Chinese people were still confined by their weak and backward characteristics and they still conducted corruptive practices. He wrote the five-thousand-word *Suicide Notes* (*jueming shu* 絕命書) and committed suicide on December 8th, 1905.

and the new concepts of sacrifice brought on by male martyrs, people began to reinterpret traditional morals and behaviors in a modern context. The concept of female martyrdom was also able to be reevaluated and reinterpreted from new perspectives. In the case of Hui Xing 惠興, she was praised as a national heroine who “sacrificed for women’s education” (*xun xue* 殉學).

As Gui Lin commented on the anniversary of Hui Xing’s death, “Hui Xing’s death was not a simple act of ending her life due to secular practice, neither for the sake of stubborn loyalty or blindly filial piety. Her death was beyond comparison with any other situations at all in modern or ancient times, in China or elsewhere” 惠氏之死, 非世俗之輕生, 亦非愚忠愚孝之盡節, 無古今, 無中外罕有其倫.¹⁹ Although Hui Xing lost her husband, she did not die for the sake of her husband (*xunfu* 殉夫), which was emphasized by traditional female virtues as a meaningful way of preserving chastity or conveying loyalty. Instead, she chose to kill herself for what she believed in, with her own volition and emotions. But, because her sacrifice was a good example that fit into the larger nationalism discourse, her death was highlighted as a desire of dying for the nation through her devotion to women’s education, which was praised as *xunxue* 殉學.

In line with the changing concept of martyrdom, the power and impacts of martyrdom (death) also became more significant and meaningful. Both Tan Sitong and Chen Tianhua were memorialized as national heroes, not only because of their advocacy on how to build a modern China, but also because of their attitudes towards death in the

¹⁹ This comment was from “Hui Xing nüshi xunxue zhounian jinianhui yanshuo” 惠興女士殉學週年紀念會演說 (A speech on the anniversary memorial ceremony of Hui Xing’s death). It was published on *Hui Xing nüxuebao*, the 2nd and 3rd issues, in June and July, 1908.

way of “awakening the world” (*xingshi* 醒世). After the failure of the “Hundred Days’ Reform Movement,” Tan Sitong refused to escape to Japan and decided to “sacrifice himself for the cause of reform” 以死來殉變法事業. He hoped that his blood and death would awaken the masses to fight against the corrupted system and to continue to struggle for a stronger and better China. For him, death was also a show of defiance toward the conservative authority. His attitude towards a significant martyrdom can also be reflected by his famous last words, “I wanted to kill the robbers, but lacked the strength to transform the world. This is the place where I should die. Rejoice, rejoice!” 有心殺賊, 無力回天. 死得其所, 快哉快哉!²⁰ Like Tan Sitong, Chen Tianhua also believed in the power and impact of death, but he chose a much more direct way to “awaken both people and the age” through committing suicide by drowning himself in Tokyo bay. To awaken the Chinese people, Chen decided to sacrifice his own life. He hoped that his death could arouse both angry and shameful emotions among his fellow countrymen, so that they could “be awakened” and face their problems. For Chen, his action of “killing himself” was an effective weapon, and he believed that his martyrdom could function as an alarm which would not only warn people of their harmful old conservative customs and habits, but also would urge them to change themselves with new and modern ideas. Following Chen Tianhua’s heroic action, Pan Yingbo 潘英伯, a Chinese student studying in Korea in 1905, who also felt frustrated with the corrupted Qing government, also committed suicide by drowning himself in Inchon.²¹

²⁰ This is Jonathan Spence’s translation in *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*. Spence translates “zei 賊” as “robbers,” but it should also refer to other types of evil people, such as traitors and invaders.

²¹ Based on Pan Yingbo’s story, Baiyun Ciren 白雲詞人, whose real name is unknown,

From Tan Sitong and Chen Tianhua to Pan Yingbo, death became a powerful and dynamic weapon through which they could make their voices heard. In the case of Hui Xing, her death is more compelling, because death is not only a way of taking control of her own life, but also a tool for her to make her point. Foucault has even contended, “suicide...was a way to usurp the power of death which the sovereign alone, whether the one here below or the Lord above, had the right to exercise...; it testified to the individual and private right to die, at the borders and in the interstices of power that was exercised over life” (“Right of Death and Power Over Life” 138-9). Indeed, committing suicide could be a very powerful method to provide a moment of escape from the power over life controlled by the authority, and put the “right of death” under one’s own control. For women, whose “right(s) of death” were generally out of their control and who generally stayed in subordinate positions, committing suicide was even more meaningful. However, for Hui Xing, the act of taking her life was a gesture of putting the “right of death” in her control, as well as a choice of her own willingness to die for what she believed in. In the farewell letter to her students, Hui Xing wrote:

I choose to die at this moment to beg for long-term funds for you, so you can study together. ...Today I sacrifice my life (*juansheng* 捐生), which is not like committing suicide (*duanjian* 短見). It is called ‘to offer sacrifices’ (*jìn xisheng* 盡犧牲), which is a rule set up in ancient time. Its purpose is to pray for accomplishing a task successfully. ... The Women’s school is

wrote a new play named *Martyr Pan Jumping into the Sea* (*Panlieshi touhai* 潘烈士投海) between 1905 to 1906. This play was collected by A Ying 阿英 in *Wanqing wenxue congchao • shuochang wenxue juan* 晚清文學叢鈔 • 說唱文學卷 (Collections of literary works of late imperial Qing • verses and prose).

like a patient, and the written request for annual fund is like a prescription.

When the request is approved, the school will get well again.

Hui Xing was not afraid of death, and she died out of her own willingness. Yet, she died with expectations and hopes. She hoped that her students and all the people whom she had “offended” by issues of establishing her school could show compassion towards her and not hate her. She also wished that her death would arouse more people to kindly support this school in order to “fulfill their responsibility” (*jin yiwu* 盡義務). Just like the Madame Roland in Liang Qichao’s depiction, Hui Xing was also an extraordinary heroine with the purest intentions. To borrow Liang’s emotional conclusion in *The Biography of Madame Roland* to comment Hui Xing’s heroic death: “To sacrifice herself for women’s education is indeed Hui Xing’s intention. Yet to face her death, when the school is still in trouble, that is far from her intention!”²² Fortunately, Hui Xing’s sacrifice did arouse attention. Moreover, the martyrdom presented by Hui Xing even played a more significant role in attracting national attention to issues related to women’s education.

As a female martyr, Hui Xing’s radical but heroic action of taking her life presents a new kind of female martyrdom, which did arouse great attention and a huge reaction. Like the above mentioned male martyrs, Hui Xing was also acknowledged as a martyr. On January 30th 1906, *Dagong Bao* published an announcement:

The Capital Newspapers Reading Office (*Jingshi yuebaochu* 京師閱報處)

had a meeting recently. The academic circle outside the capital (Beijing)

²² Liang’s reflects on Madame Roland’s heroic life can be translated as: “To sacrifice herself for the nation is indeed Madame Roland’s intention. Yet to face her death... when the revolution has succeeded, that is far from her intention!”

have all mourned the two martyrs Chen (Tianhua) and Pan (Yingbo), and lady Hui Xing. Therefore, the Newspapers Reading office plan to cooperate with colleagues to organize a memorial ceremony somewhere, in order to express their condolence.

Influenced by the enlightenment movement, Newspapers Reading Offices (*Yuebaochu* 閱報處) began to be established and popularized in China around 1904. Its main purpose was providing public places for people to read newspapers together as well as to exchange ideas and comments on certain publications. Because of its social functions, Newspapers Reading Offices became an important public space for the circulation of news and thoughts. The announcement made by the Capital Newspapers Reading Office was comparatively more influential. Besides accepting Hui Xing's status as a female martyr like Chen and Pan, this announcement also reflected the great social impact of her death. Because almost the whole academic circle was lamenting these martyrs, The Capital Newspapers Reading Offices needed to join the national memorial.

This response by The Capital Newspapers Reading Offices further proved the power of a heroic modern martyrdom. As for the impact of the new female martyrdom presented by Hui Xing, it was more than simple acknowledgement. Yang Tingshu 楊廷書, an active journalist for *Shuntian Shibao*, summarized the profound influence of Hui Xing's death as, it can "awake the national soul" (*huanxing guohun* 喚醒國魂), "motivate the academic circle" (*jili xuejie* 激勵學界), and "develop the country" (*xingqi guojia* 興起國家).²³ As Xia Xiaohong has argued, out of these three kinds of impact,

²³ This was from "Xuji shufan nüxuexiao zhuidaohui yanshuoci" 續記淑範女學校追悼會演說詞 (Continuation of the speech on the memorial ceremony at Shufan Women's

“motivating the academic circle” was more appropriate to describe the reality (*Women in Late Qing*... 247). Because almost all the press used the catchphrase *xunxue* 殉學 when they were publicizing Hui Xing’s story, Hui Xing’s death became a useful and powerful force to promote women’s education.

Actually, Hui Xing’s death did have momentous impact on the history of Chinese women’s education. With more and more women’s schools established by foreign missionaries in the 1830s and 1840s, abolishing women’s foot-binding and promoting women’s education were often regarded as important parts of advocating equal rights between men and women. Particularly, the women’s education revolution, in the eyes of political reformers, was indispensable to the political reform and self-improvement movement, which would influence the ultimate goal of building a strong and wealthy nation. Liang Qichao, for example, as an active reformer, wrote the famous article, “On Women’s Education,” in 1896 and greatly contributed to the establishment of the first women’s organization, “Association for Promoting Women’s Learning” (*Nüxuehui* 女學會), in 1897 in Shanghai. In April 1898, “School of the Association for Promoting Women’s Learning” (*Nüxuehui shushu* 女學會書塾) (also called Jing Zheng Women’s School 經正女學), the first women’s school operated by Chinese educators, was founded by Jing Yuanshan 經元善 in Shanghai. Since then, more and more private women’s schools, although still limited, began to develop across the country. In Beijing, although women’s education emerged in 1904, it was because of the series of activities related to Hui Xing’s story that the cause of establishing women’s schools gained the attention and understanding of people from various circles. In 1906, the development of women’s

School). It was published at *Shuntian Shibao* on Feb. 7th, 1906.

schools reached a climax. As it was said in the article, “The Prosperity of Women’s Education” (*Nüxue fada* 女學發達), “since the death of lady Hui Xing, women’s education in Beijing has gradually reached a period of prosperity.”²⁴ However, along with the acknowledgement of the significance of Hui Xing’s death in the discourse of nationalism and women’s education, the racial conflicts between Han people and Manchurians also extremely influenced the glorification of Hui Xing’s image and her contribution to the discourse of women’s education.

The Lament of Hui Xing’s Death and the Racial Tensions within the Discourse of Women’s Education

Although the practices of lauding Hui Xing’s sacrifice for national liberation through promoting women’s education gained high acknowledgement in mass media at that time, in terms of the introduction of Hui Xing’s ethnic identity as a Manchurian and the attention on her school, there was much more complexity involved in this issue than appears.

When Hui Xing’s story was first published, newspapers did not emphasize or pay much attention to her identity. Following traditional custom of introducing women, *Shen Bao*’s article identified Hui Xing as Pu’s daughter and Jishan’s wife. Her Manchurian identity, however, was implied through Hui Xing’s own oath on the opening day of “the Manchurian women’s school” 旗城女校成立之日. In the article, “The Story of Lady Hui Xing Dying for Promoting Education” (*Hui Xin nüshi xunxue ji* 惠馨女士殉學記), published by *Dongfang Zazhi* 東方雜誌 in June 1906, the author not only made a

²⁴ This article was published in *Da Gong Bao*, on April 3rd, 1906.

mistake on Hui Xing's name, but also simply used "being a widow at an early age" (*zao shuangju* 早孀居) to introduce Hui Xing's family background. While quite a few influential newspapers actively publicized Hui Xing's story, *Jingzhong Ribao* 警鐘日報 (Daily Alarm), however, did not publish any articles on Hui Xing's story. Taking the element of ethnical identity into consideration was perhaps one possible reason for this. As a newspaper that fully promoted "anti-Manchu revolution," it is highly possible that *Jingzhong Ribao* "missed," intentionally or not, the story of a Manchurian woman, Hui Xing, in its publications, even though *Jingzhong Ribao* supported women's education. It was not until some newspapers published the proposal by many officials requesting to give commendation to Hui Xing that her Manchurian identity was explicitly clarified. For example, on July 19th, 1906, about four months after Hui Xing's death, *Da Gong Pao* published "A Draft Proposal on Honoring Hui Xing" (*Niqing daizou wei Hui Xing nuishi qingjing zhengao* 擬請代奏為惠興女士請旌摺稿) by Jin Liang 金梁, one of the most famous Manchurian literati who served as a secretary in the Grand Secretariat of Qing government. In his proposal, Jin Liang says:

If we think about a person who eagerly advocates for training people with the consideration of the nation, and sincerely engages in cultivating people with the spirit of developing education; who aims at promoting women's education by taking the responsibility of enlightening people; who devotes him/herself to his/her countrymen with enthusiasm, and who generously offers everything he/she has, even his/her life, in the society of women,

since we have historical records of five thousand years, no one can compare with this Ms. Guwalgiya.²⁵

Jin Liang's proposal associates "national thoughts" with the development of education. He acclaimed Hui Xing because she was not only enthusiastic in opening people's minds (*minzhi kaitong* 民智開通) through promoting women's education (*xingxue* 興學), but also took this as her responsibility and could heroically sacrifice herself for it. Jin Liang's comment reflected the popular rallying cry to "save the country through promoting women's education." Hui Xing's action of establishing a women's school, no doubt, appealed to the social requirement. But more importantly, Jin Liang clearly pointed out Hui Xing's ethnic identity and directly used Guwalgiya, rather than Hui Xing, to address her and comment on her actions. However, one question is still unresolved: why didn't Hui Xing's school arouse much attention when it was first established? Why, only after Hui Xing's death, did it receive the attention it deserved? Did it also relate to Hui Xing's ethnical identity? To further explore this question, it is necessary to briefly examine the racial tensions during the late Qing.

The tension between the Han people and the Manchurians had existed since the latter established the Qing dynasty in 1644, but it became more acute with the increase of national crises and the decay of Qing administration. When the consciousness of ethnic identity integrated with ideology of nationalism, the national revolution became a powerful factor for revolutionaries to advocate political revolution. As a result, on the

²⁵ In Jin Liang's proposal, it clearly stated, "The heroine Hui Xing, Guwalgiya, from Hangzhou garrison was the wife of deceased scholar Ji Shan, and the mother of bannerman Jin Xian." Guwalgiya is one of the eight most powerful Manchurian clans. Hui Xing was a member of this clan. In the proposal by Hangzhou General Rui Xing, Hui Xing's identity was specified as a member of "bordered blue banner."

one hand, radical anti-Manchurian revolutionaries and organizations, such as the Chinese United League (*Tongmenghui* 同盟會) led by Sun Yat-sen 孫中山, took “expelling the northern barbarians (Manchu)” (*quchu dalu* 驅除韃虜) (*manzu* 滿族) as one of the goals of the political revolution and the foundation of a new nation. On the other hand, the Qing government that was dominated by imperial Manchurian authorities made great concessions to alleviate the antagonism between Han people and Manchurians, such as providing more positions for Han people in the government, and abolishing the law against intermarriage between Manchurians and Han people. However, due to the different customs and characteristics between the two ethnic groups, the Qing government’s efforts could not bridge the gap that was formed over more than two hundred years.

In terms of education, the bias on ethnicity tremendously influenced the establishment of schools and the enrollment of the students. Facing this severe situation, Manchurian intellectuals began to pay attention to not only the fate of the country, but also the destiny of the Manchu. Some literati objected to the practice of school managers who were confined by the prejudice against Han people or Manchurians. They maintained that, “to reconcile the conflicts between the Han people and Manchurians, it is better to make good use of the chance of establishing schools and promoting education, so that the mutual rejection, imputation, and attack shaped in two hundred years could be reconciled in the process of civilization, and make the Han people and Manchurians be one family.”²⁶ There were also Manchurians who either became more hostile to Han

²⁶ This comment is from the article named “*Lun jinashe xuetang yichu manhan zhi mingmu* 論建設學堂宜除滿漢之名目” (On abolishing the distinctions between Han people and Manchurian when establishing schools). This article was published in *Da*

people because of the radical rejection from revolutionaries, like Liang Bi 良弼,²⁷ or became extremely anxious about the fate of the Manchu, and even took radical actions like Mr. Zeng 曾某, who was so pessimistic about the future of the Manchu that he killed himself at home.²⁸

Joining the literati who worried about the future of the Manchu, Hui Xing also expressed her concerns, especially facing the racial tensions and the trend of social reform and revolution. In her farewell letter to her students, Hui Xing wrote, “the present world is in the time of political reform and modernization. You should look at how the Han people promote education. The situation will significantly change only in a few years. If you do not believe me, you can think it yourself. How was the situation five or six years ago, and how is it in the recent two years?” Hui Xing spoke out about her worries but also acknowledged the trend of social and political reform. She fully realized that there would be no future for Manchurians unless they follow the trend and carry out certain reforms for Manchurian education. Han people’s promotion of education further intensified Hui Xing’s concerns. Therefore, she warned her students, “[you] should be determined to compare with outsiders (*wairen* 外人) and prove yourselves, rather than fighting with people of your own race (*tongburen* 同部人), which will be laughed by

Gong Bao on March 7, 1906. Although the author’s identity is unknown, we still can predict the supportive attitude of the Manchurian editor Ying Lianzhi 英斂之, who published this article.

²⁷ Liang Bi 良弼 (1877-1912) was a Manchurian minister in late Qing government. He supported constitutionalism, and organized Zongshe Dang 宗社黨, aka, Junzhu Lixian Weichihui 君主立憲維持會 (Constitutional Monarchy Support Committee). When he was studied in Japan in 1904, due to the conflicts with Han overseas students, he wrote to the Qing government and requested to restrict Han people to enter the official career. This story and Liang Bi’s proposal were mentioned by Xia Xiaohong in her book *Women in Late Qing and Modern China*, p 226.

²⁸ Ibid, pp 226-7.

outsiders (*wairen* 外人).” With the consideration of Hui Xing’s comments on the situation of Han people, the “outsiders” (*wairen* 外人) probably referred to the Han people. This was implicitly proved by Gui Lin in the “Foreword to *Hui Xing Women’s Education Newspaper*.” (*Hui Xing nüxuebao fakanci* <惠興女學報>發刊詞) Gui Lin wrote, “Lady Hui Xing was very angry about the announcement made by one women’s school that refused to enroll Manchurian women, so she determined to establish Zhenwen Women’s School.”²⁹ In the speech delivered on the memorial ceremony for Hui Xing in Hangzhou, Gui Lin further claimed, “with the death of Hui Xing, the three hundred years of our Qing empire turns into a live history, the noble characteristics of our Manchu can be presented to the world, and our Asian women’s sphere can get rid of thousands of years’ darkness and restore brightness.”³⁰ Gui Lin’s statements not only point out the racial elements behind the establishment of Zhenwen Women’s School, but also reveal the racial tension within the national discourse of education, particularly in women’s education. From the perspective of racial tension, the acclaim of Hui Xing made by the Qing government and Manchurian intellectuals, like Gui Lin, reveals the intention of encouraging Manchurian spirit through the eulogy of Hui Xing.

However, it turned out that Hui Xing was not memorialized as a Manchurian heroine, rather as a national one, because the Han intellectuals also showed respect and lauded her as an exceptional woman. The first memorial ceremony was initiated by

²⁹ When Gui Lin wrote the “Foreword to *Hui Xing Women’s Education Newspaper*,” he used the penname of Zhongquan Jushi 中權居士. This article was published in the first issue of *Hui Xing Nüxuebao* in May 1908.

³⁰ This is from “Hangzhou qicheng wei Hui Xing nüshi kai zhiudaohui yanshuo” 杭州旗城為惠興女士開追悼會演說 (The speech on the memorial ceremony for Hui Xing in Hangzhou), which was published on the 2nd issue of *Hui Xing Nüxuebao* in June 1908.

Zhang Junxiang 張筠薌, the co-founder of *Beijing nübao* 北京女報 (Beijing Women's Newspaper), at Taoran Pavilion 陶然亭 in Beijing on January 31st 1906. The people who participated in this ceremony were "the most influential people of Beijing women's circle" 北京女界最有聲望之人.³¹ But the one that attracted the most attention was the grand memorial ceremony held at the Shufan Women's School (*Shufan nüxuexiao* 淑範女學校) in Beijing on February 2nd.³² Nearly five hundred people from all walks of life in Beijing attended this ceremony. In this ceremony, people brought about forty elegiac couplets and four people made speeches. All participants panegyricized Hui Xing's devotion to women's education and regarded her suicide as a heroic action of "sacrificing oneself for saving the nation."³³ In addition, they praised Hui Xing as "the greatest woman in women's circle in China's six thousand years of history" 中國六千年來女界第一偉人.³⁴

These public activities and memorial ceremonies led by the Han literati and

³¹ This comment was from "Beijing nübaoguan lai han di'er" 北京女報館來函第二 (The Second Letter). Although there was no information about the receiver, it seems that Zhang Zhanyun 張展云, the co-founder of *Beijing Women's Newspaper* and the daughter of Zhang Junxiang 張筠薌, wrote this letter to an editor of another publisher to share the news of the memorial ceremony for Hui Xing and its positive reception. This letter was published in *Hui Xing nüxue bao*, issue No.6, in Oct. 1908.

³² *Shufan nüxuexiao* 淑範女學校 was a private women's school established in March 1905. It was one of the early established women's schools resulted from the enlightenment movement.

³³ References of this memorial ceremony include, "Ji Beijing shufan nüxuexiao wei Hui Xing nüshi junxing zhuidaohui yishi" 記北京淑範女學校為惠興女傑舉行追悼會儀式 (On the memorial ceremony for the exceptional lady Hui Xing at Beijing Shufan Women's School) in *Shuntian shibao*, Feb. 6th, 1906; and "Shufan nüxuexiao kai zhuidaohui xiangji" 淑範女學校開追悼會詳紀 (A detailed report of the memorial ceremony held at Shufan Women's School) in *Da Gong Bao*, February 6th, 1906.

³⁴ On Feb. 8th, *Shuntian shibao* published the speech made by its reporter Yang Tingshu (Zhiyi) 楊廷書 (志伊) at the ceremony. In this speech, Yang made this commentary.

political activists, in fact, implied their yearning for “reconciling the conflicts between the Han people and Manchurians” (Xia, *Women in Late Qing...* 245-7). This yearning was explicitly articulated by Yang Tingshu, the active journalist of *Shuntian Shibao*. Yang believed the primary problem in Chinese society was the gap between the Han people and Manchurian, so it was important and urgent to bridge the gap, eliminate the bias, and clear the obstructions between the two ethnical groups. In terms of establishing schools, it should not differentiate women from men, or Han people from the Manchurians. Yang further argued,

The exceptional woman, Hui Xing, was a great person, who was so surprisingly admirable, pitiable, formidable, honorable, incomparable, and unforgettable that must be eulogized. [People] acknowledge the exceptional woman Hui Xing without being aware that [she was] Manchurian or Han; [people] admire Hui Xing without differentiating the Manchurians or the Han. When [people] mourn Hui Xing for her dying for promoting education, the idea of “groupment” (*hequn* 合群) is flourishing; and when [people] mourn Hui Xing for her dying for the nation, the passion of “protecting nationality” (*baozhong* 保種) is thriving.³⁵

Therefore, the act of holding a memorial ceremony for Hui Xing, in Yang Tingshu’s opinion, functioned as “a great assisting agent to bridge the boundary between the Han people and Manchurians” 調和滿漢界限的大助動力. Although Yang

³⁵ These comments were from Yang Tingshu’s monograph “Shenlun xuejie baojie kaihui zhuidao Hui Xing nüjie wei tiaohu manhan jixian zhudongli” 申論學界報界開會追悼惠興女傑為調和滿漢界限助動力 (On the memorial ceremonies for exceptional woman Hui Xing held by the press circle and the educational circle functioning as an assisting agent to bridge the boundary between the Han people and Manchurians). This article was published in *Shuntian Shibao* on Feb. 9th, 1906.

exaggerated the influence of the public mourning for Hui Xing, he revealed one reason why Hui Xing's story attracted more attention in northern China. The social atmosphere for public opinions tended to yield to subjective propaganda; that is, emphasizing Hui Xing's heroic action of sacrificing for promoting women's education and her contributions to the higher cause of national salvation more, while overlooking or attenuating her ethnical identity. Despite its limited effectiveness to "reconcile the conflicts between the Han people and Manchurian," the actions of widely mourning and popularizing Hui Xing's heroic and significant death touched quite a lot people, both the Han people and the Manchurians. Ultimately, while issues related to racial tension faded from the focus of Hui Xing's story, how Hui Xing promoted women's education with her back to the wall and how her martyrdom played an important role in national salvation gained more compassion and admiration. As a result, Hui Xing turned into a modern exemplary woman with national acceptance, which tremendously contributed to fundraising and charity events for her school.

In addition, with more and more newspapers and magazines publicizing Hui Xing's heroic actions in various formats, such as in vernacular, classical Chinese writings, and parallel prose, people from all circles, particularly the press circle, academic circle, and theatrical circle, became very active in raising funds for Hui Xing's school. Among all the fundraising and charity events, the ones initiated by the theatrical circle were of crucial importance, particularly the charity performance of a "new play" (*xinxi* 新戲) called *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* (*Hui Xing nüshi zhuan* 惠興女士傳), which exerted a tremendous influence on publicizing Hui Xing's story and raising funds for Hui Xing's school. In the following section, I will focus on *The Story of Lady Hui Xing*, in terms of

both the new style of performance and its existing script to explore how the theatrical literary performance represented the modern transformation and how *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* implied the complexity of Hui Xing's story, especially the complication of feminist struggles at that time.

An Examination of The “New Play” *The Story of Lady Hui Xing*

Because of its social influences, Hui Xing's story became valuable material for literary creations. According to the studies of Xia Xiaohong, there were two versions of *The Story of Lady Hui Xing*. One was written and performed by Tian Jiyun 田際云 (1864-1925). But later, playwright Wang Zhongsheng 王鐘聲 (1880-1911), one of the pioneers who advocated for the modern drama movement, also directed a five-scene “new play,” and personally acted as the protagonist Hui Xing (“Wang Zhongsheng ... 151). Although both versions played very important roles in the history of Chinese Peking opera and drama performances, very limited information can be found about the scripts of this play. Therefore, my analysis is based on the incomplete script of Tian Jiyun's version (only seventeen scenes)³⁶ and the summary of Wang Zhongsheng's version (five-act play) by Gui Lin,³⁷ both of which were published in *Hui Xing Women's*

³⁶ Parts of the Script of *The Story of Lady Hui Xing*, which was performed by Tian Jiyuan but edited by Dong Zhusun 董竹蓀, were published at *Hui Xing Nüxuebao* (Hui Xing Women's Education Newspaper) issues No 12-19, on Apr. to Oct. 1909. These fragmented scripts were the seventeen scenes in the second Act. In terms of the number of acts in *The Story of Lady Hui Xing*, it is still in dispute. According to “Wenming ximu” 文明戲目 (The program of modern plays), which was designed for the first performance of *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* and republished at *Hui Xing Nüxuebao* issue No. 14, on June 1909, this play originally contained four acts. However, in the advertisement for *Hui Xing Nüxuebao*, in May 1906, it said there were six acts.

³⁷ Gui Lin was invited to watch *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* played by Wang Zhongsheng on July 13, 1908, and he gave a detailed report on this play in the article “Zhitongjian

Education Newspaper.

Touched by Hui Xing's brave action, Zhang Zhanyun 張展云, and Tian Jiyun 田際云 (1864-1925), who was one of the most famous Peking opera performers, decided to raise funds for Hui Xing's Zhenwen Women's School. Zhang and Tian co-established the Women's Education Support Society (Funü kuangxuehui 婦女匡學會), and brought Hui Xing's story to the stage in order to collect charity. Soon after Hui Xing's death, in March 1906, a new play named *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* was performed in Longevity Teahouse (*Fushou tang* 福壽堂) in Beijing. At the beginning, the show times for this play were only three days and nights, and the tickets were only sold to women audiences. Most of the performers acted for free, except a few performers with supporting roles, so almost all the income was sent to Hangzhou for the operation of Zhenwen Women's School. Later, it played for two more days in May to collect more funds. Because *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* won great acclamation and warm reception, more famous teahouse theatres in Beijing and Tianjin, such as Promoting Virtue Teahouse (*Guangde lou* 廣德樓), Fortune and Longevity Teahouse (*Fushou tang* 福壽堂), and Goddess Teahouse (*Tianxian chalu* 天仙茶園) all began to invite the opera troupe. As a result, the performance of this play became an important fundraising activity, which further stimulated more charity.

In addition, it received positive reception. From 1906 to 1907, *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* not only played many times in Beijing and Tianjin, but also aroused the attention of the Qing government. In June 1906, the Imperial Household Department

xuexiao xuesheng banyan 'Hui Xing nüshi' xinxi" 志通鑒學校學生扮演“惠興女士”新戲 (Students of Zhitongjian school playing the new play *The Story of Lady Hui Xing*).

gathered all the leading performers of Opera troupes in Beijing and asked them to perform *Women Love Her Country* (*Nüzi aiguo* 女子愛國) and *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* at Summer Palace for Empress Dowager Cixi and other officials. The performance of *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* in imperial palace signified that the practices of promoting women's education, which were more non-government activities, were gradually being accepted by the government. Indeed, on March 8th 1907, the Department of Education issued "The Regulations for Women's School" (*Nüxuetang zhangcheng* 女學堂章程), which meant promoting women's education was legitimate since then. Moreover, Tiang Jiyun was also granted a "silver prize" by the Patrol Police Department for his efforts in providing "political assistance to the progress of the society."³⁸

The great impact of *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* was benefited from both its new performance style and its representation of Hui Xing and her story. I would like to now start with a discussion of the genre—"new play" (*xinxi* 新戲)—itself. The "new play" (*xinxi* 新戲) was also called the "reformed Chinese opera" (*gailiangxi* 改良戲), the "fashion Chinese opera" (*shizhuangxi* 時裝戲), and the "civilized play, or modern play" (*wenmingxi* 文明戲). It emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century with social and political change. Liang Qichao's advocacy of "the revolution of the fiction" in 1902 also opened the prelude of "the reform in the theatric circle" (*xiju geming* 戲劇革命). Since 1902, *Da Gong Bao*, *Beijing Nübao*, and *Jinghua Ribao* 京話日報 (Beijing daily) began to publish speeches and discussions on the theatric reform. In Oct. 1904, Chen Qubing 陳

³⁸ This was mentioned in the "Xuebu zhuyi Xu Yu tiaochen xuewu yaozhe" 學部遵議徐瑀條陳學務要折 (Important Reports on Education Department's Discussion of Xu Yu's Request) published at *Beijing Nübao*, No 642.

去病, Wang Xiaonong 汪笑儂, and quite a few intellectuals founded a journal called *Ershi Shijie Dawutai* 二十世紀大舞台 (The grand stage of the twentieth century), which specialized in promoting the reform in the theatric circle. The years 1906 and 1907 witnessed the climax of theatric reform in the northern areas. As “one of the initiators of theatric reform in Beijing,” Tian Jiyun played a significant role in promoting the reform, and his work, *The Story of Lady Hui Xing*, became a pioneer piece in Beijing and nearby areas (Hu Q. 18).

The characteristics of “new play” were different from both the traditional Chinese theatric performance and the Western drama. Although such kinds of play/theatric performances were still performed in traditional aria and rhythm, its performance style and contents changed significantly. The terms “the fashion Chinese opera” or “the play on current events,” and “modern play” conveyed the major features of this play. First, instead of dressing in traditional theatric costume and performing historical stories, the actors wore modern costumes (or daily clothes) and brought current events and venues into theatric presentations. Second, before the performance, there were speeches or lectures discussing political and social issues with the purpose of enlightening the audience. Such a practice, in Xia Xiaohong’s words, “combined two forms of enlightenment—lectures and theatric performance” (“The Modern Play...” 114), which was a very unique feature in the process of theatric reform.

The Story of Lady Hui Xing particularly made good use of the unique feature. At the beginning, the fundraising organizers, some intellectuals, or celebrities came to the stage to explain the purpose of the charity performance and summarize the plot. The number of the speakers varied from time to time, but their speeches were all very

influential and inspiring. Take the speeches delivered at Promoting Virtue Teahouse for example. Peng Yizhong 彭翼仲, the chief editor of *Jinghua Ribao*, gave a speech on the purpose of today's lectures. Wang Zizhen 王子貞, an enlightened intellectual and the co-founder of the *Zhengzhu Aiguo bao* 正宗愛國報 (Authentic patriotism newspaper), gave a lecture on "the history of civic donation" (Guominjuan zhi lishi 國民捐之歷史). Zhang Zhanyun, the chief editor of *Beijing Nübao*, also gave a brief summarization of the touching story of Hui Xing. With the completion of Zhang's speech, *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* started, which immediately imbued the audience with true emotions. Moreover, Wang's speech on the significant concept of "country/nation-state" (*guo* 國), explained a profound theory in simple words, which deeply touched the audiences. The lectures, together with the great impact of the play itself, made almost every audience agree with a nod.³⁹ One time, the host even invited a person, who was the prototype of an important character in the play, to the stage to talk about the situation of Hui Xing's school after her death in order to arouse more compassion and reflection (Ma 5).

In addition, "transformed speeches" were also incorporated in the theatric play and passed to the audience through the actors. Through these interactive practices, characters in or outside the play and people on or off stage could further connected, and intellectuals, actors, and audiences could also conduct very positive and effective communication. As a result, not only was the basic goal of collecting funds for Hui Xing's school realized, but also the higher goals—"opening people's minds" (*kai minzhi* 開民智) and "producing new citizens" (*zao xinmin* 造新民), which were proposed by

³⁹ This comment was from the news, "Guangdelou yanchang xinxi" 廣德樓演唱新戲 (The new play performed at the Promoting Virtue Teahouse), published at *Jinghua ribao* No. 629.

Liang Qichao—were achieved. As it was commented, *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* selected a story that was “good for the human heart” (*youyi renxin* 有益人心) and “enough to open people’s minds.” Such a practice, “combined the education of the ignorant and unenlightened with recreation, which made up for a lack of school, and could be very helpful for the development of the society and the cultivation of the human heart.”⁴⁰

More importantly, the performance of *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* also received official approvals, which meant that, while the lectures and the play worked as efficient tools of “enlightenment,” the main themes and ideas expressed by them did not contradict the Qing government. The performance of *The Story of Lady Hui Xing*, thus, became an agent and a medium to communicate with people from different social positions, higher or lower.

Reports on how *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* deeply moved the audiences could be found in many newspapers at that time. In the article in *Jinghua Ribao*, it said, “when it came to the scenes, such as Hui Xing submitting the request after she took the poison and people sadly accompanying Hui Xing’s coffin in the memorial hall, everyone could not help but shed tears.”⁴¹ In the one published in *Da Gong Bao* describing the performance at the Promoting Virtue Teahouse, it stated, “While all the audiences gave warm applause (for the successful performance), a cry burst out ... and soon, turned into a wail without ceasing. It was not until the guards talked to the audience that she stopped crying. It

⁴⁰ This commentary was from the article “Lun yanjū jīyī gǎiliang” 論演劇急宜改良 (On the urgent requirement for theatric reform), which was published in *Shengjing shibao* 盛京時報 (Shenyang daily), on May 4th, 1907.

⁴¹ This was from the article “Xuejieren kentīng xīnxi” 學界人肯聽新戲 (People of the educational circle willingly watching the new plays), which was published on the issue of No. 631.

turned out that she was so deeply affected by the play that she could not control her emotions.”⁴² This cry, in the author’s interpretation, “was the first touching sound in the more than two hundred years’ history of Beijing theaters.”⁴³ It is not difficult to imagine that the plot related to Hui Xing’s tragic but heroic death, under the reproduction of the performers and the influence of theatric atmosphere, could be vividly presented in front of the audiences and directly arouse their sorrow and compassion. But, the image of Hui Xing in the play is presented not only as a martyr, but also as a mother figure and a modern woman who had to deal with all the troubles while struggling for women’s freedom and a better future.

In Tian Jiye’s version of *The Story of Lady Hui Xing*, Hui Xing first comes on the stage as a concerned mother. When she introduces herself as a widow who has been raising her son alone, she sighs:

Since I lost my husband, I have remained unmarried year after year.
Like the clear water and pure jade, my story of preserving chastity will be
told from generation to generation.
Raising my son alone is not easy, but I did not spare him from education,
So that one day he will be able to carry on the family name.
柏舟⁴⁴ 苦節守年年, 水清玉潔萬古傳。
撫養遺孤多教訓, 好教異日接香煙。

This poem, while presenting Hui Xing as a virtuous, chaste woman, also presents

⁴² This was from the article “Wenming xiju zhi gandongli” 文明戲劇之感召力 (The affection of modern play), which was published on June 4th, 1906.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ *baizhou* 柏舟 means “cypress boat.” “柏舟之節” is from *Classic of Poetry* • *Cypress Boat* (*shijing* • *baizhou* 詩經 • 柏舟), and refers to the chastity of remaining unmarried after the husband died.

an image of a caring mother who is waiting for her son's success. The image of an anxious mother is further strengthened by the dialogue between Hui Xing and her servant. After knowing that her son Jin Xian has not come back home, she expresses her worry because she is afraid that her son is too fond of play and will fall behind in his study. Later, when Jin Xian comes back, Hui Xing asks Jin Xian to kneel down and blames him for his roaming on the street instead of doing homework. Hui Xing worries that he will fail to live up to her expectations. With tears, she tells her son that she does not mind enduring all kinds of hardships as long as he can "study hard with determination and serve the royal court after he grows up" 立志念書長大成人報效皇家. To make sure Jin Xian will never do this again, she is going to "teach him a lesson" (*guanjiao* 管教) by the family disciplines (*jiafa* 家法). She is not relieved until Jin Xian tells her that he is delayed because he went to see the announcement on promoting education.

The representation of Hui Xing in this scene does not seem to deviate from the image of traditional mothers. However, more than archetypal mothers would, she shows stronger concern towards the importance of education, especially the importance of family education. For Hui Xing, "to provide educations to the children as a mother" is extremely important, which can be seen from her comment on Mencius' mother. Hui Xing praises Mencius' mother who moves three times in order to let Mencius get proper education as the best example of *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* (*Ershisi xiao* 二十四孝). Although the story of "Mencius' mother moving three times" (*Mengmu sanqian* 孟母三遷) is well-known as a great example of a wise mother, it is not in any texts

concerning filial piety,⁴⁵ let alone the classic moral texts such as *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* or *The Twenty-four Female Filial Exemplars* (*Nü ershi xiao* 女二十四孝).

This meticulous design in this play values “mother education” (*mujiao* 母教) as important as other moral matters such as filial piety, which directly reflects the thoughts of intellectuals, such as Liang Qichao and Jin Tianhe, who fully supported women’s education because of their crucial roles in raising healthy and well-educated children. While highlighting the importance of mother’s education, the play automatically brings out to the issue of promoting women’s education.

In Wang’s version, Hui Xing is determined to establish a women’s school after she reads *Exhortation to Study* (*Quanxue pian* 勸學篇) written by Zhang Zhidong 張之洞, but in Tian’s version, Hui Xing’s such consideration is triggered by the official announcement of promoting education. In the play, Jin Xian explains the reason for his late return home. He was attracted by the government announcement, which emphasizes that, “In order to “open people’s minds” (*kai minzhi* 開民智) and “strengthen the country” (*qiang guo* 強國), it is immediately necessary to widely “establish schools” (*li xuetang* 立學堂), especially women’s schools so as to promote the mother’s education.” After Hui Xing hears about this announcement, she is very excited and plans to establish a women’s school in order to provide all the women in the city the opportunity to be educated. For

⁴⁵ *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* (*Ershisi xiao* 二十四孝) was written by Guo Jingju 郭敬居 (1260-1368) during Yuan dynasty and was regarded as a classic text of Confucius filial piety since then. After its publication, several revised editions and similar works were released, including: *Complete Diary Stories of the Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* (*Riji gushi daquan ershi xiao* 日記故事大全二十四孝), *Female Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* (*Nü ershi xiao* 女二十四孝), and *Male and Female Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* (*Nan nü ershi xiao* 男女二十四孝).

Hui Xing, the women's society is too dark, but she believes that the day for women to "raise their heads" (*chutou* 出頭), which can also be interpreted as "to appear in the public" or "to free themselves," is coming.

Hui Xing's thought explicitly represents her as a modern woman. Obeying traditional women's virtue, Hui Xing is confined at home and cannot "appear in public." She has to ask her son to buy "new books" (*xinshu* 新書, which refer to the books with new ideas and modern thoughts) for her, and she has to persuade her uncle-in-law to join her in order to prepare for the establishment of the women's school. In reality, Hui Xing was tragically "trapped" at home until her death. Even after she took the opium and planned to make a point by completing her suicide in the presence of the court, she was finally prevented from leaving home before the poison overtook her. In the play, however, it is Hui Xing's great desire that education could help women to "free themselves" (*chutou* 出頭).

The struggle of "freeing women" is full of difficulties, as it is represented in the process of preparing for the women's school. In Wang's version, according to the summary, the conflicts are mainly between Hui Xing and her female friends. They not only refuse to donate money, but also hinder other people's donation, and they even plan to undermine the school. Whereas in the incomplete script of Tian's version, it illustrates how Hui Xing debates with men who doubt the necessity and possibility of establishing a women's school.

When Hui Xing invites all the gentlemen and rich officials to discuss the issue of establishing a women's school, they begin to doubt her ideas and question the differences between "(modern) school" (*xuetang* 學堂) and "(traditional) academy" (*shuyuan* 書院).

Hui Xing replies:

In the first decades, the academy was the place for training talents. However, people spend almost their whole lives and energy to learn the “eight-part essays” (*baguwen* 八股文) for the imperial examination. Although he may have been profoundly learned, he only knows scholarly books such as Guan Yunshan’s works ⁴⁶ or *Critiques on Eight-part Essays Written by One-hundred-and-Twenty Experts by Keyi Hall*. ⁴⁷ If you ask his opinions about current events and situations, he knows nothing. What on earth is the use of the knowledge he has learned? How can the knowledge help in resisting against a foreign country?The weakness of China is that we lack “the thoughts of Nation-state” (*guojia sixiang* 國家思想), and we also do not “value industry” (*qingqiu shiye* 講求實業). For the sake of our current situation, we must establish schools to teach “common knowledge” (*putong zhishi* 普通知識) as soon as possible.

Like reformists, such as Zhang Zhidong 張之洞, Hui Xing criticizes the traditional civil-service examination system and believes that modern education can help to solve China’s problems and can “awaken the national soul” (*huanxing guohun* 喚醒國魂). Through this debate, Hui Xing’s image transforms from a simple mother to an

⁴⁶ Guan Yunshan 管韞山 is the courtesy name of Guan Shiming 管世銘 (1738-1798). He was a very influential scholar and politician during Emperor Qianlong 乾隆 period.

⁴⁷ *Critiques on Eight-part Essays Written by One-hundred-and-Twenty Experts by Keyi Hall* 可儀堂一百二十名家制藝 was written by Yu Changcheng 俞长城 (dates of birth and death were unknown) during Kangxi 康熙 Period. In this book, Yu collected and made comments on the works of many famous scholars from North Song dynasty till early Qing dynasty, such as Wang Anshi 王安石, Su Zhe 蘇轍, Yang Wanli 楊萬里.

enlightened modern woman, who not only cares about the future of the nation, but also has remarkable insight into the national problems. In fact, the Qing government abolished the use of “eight-part essays” in 1901, and officially abolished the “Civic Service Examination System” (*keju zhidu* 科舉制度) in September 1905. With the abolishment of old examination system and the promotion of modern schools, an urgent issue was how to provide instructions and guidance for school educations, especially for women’s schools. In 1905, the Qing government established the Department of Education (*xuebu* 學部), but it started to manage issues on women’s education in 1906, and regulations for women’s school were not issued until 1907.

It is also clear in the play that Hui Xing’s school was beginning to reform women’s education in a modern context. The meanings of *xue* 學, with the influence of Western thought, began to blend with new knowledge, ideas and concepts, such as “Western learning” (*xixue* 西學), “science” (*kexue* 科學), and “branches of knowledge” (*xueke* 學科). Therefore, the interpretation of *nüxue* 女學 is not as simple as “women’s education,” and it should be examined by understanding the contestation between traditional women’s morality teaching and the modern concepts brought into women’s education for women’s emancipation. In terms of the subjects for women’s education, Tian’s version brings up some concerns through Zhenwen Women’s School’s curriculum and regulations. In the play, after the establishment of the school, Hui Xing tells her students:

[You should] come to school at eight o’ clock every morning. In the morning, you learn common knowledge for three hours and geography for one hour. In the afternoon, you will have one hour of physical education

and continue to learn Chinese and geography. After you go back home in the evening, you are supposed to learn by yourselves. You will be expelled if you violate the following regulations: one, skipping school without approval; two, wearing makeup; and three, wearing showy clothes.

This statement shows how Chinese traditional women's learning and moral requirements are integrated with modern subjects and knowledge, as it is represented through both the subjects and the regulations. Whereas subjects such as geography and physical education were new for women's education at that time, learning traditional Chinese texts continued to be part of women's education. As for the concept of "common knowledge," which emphasized the basic and useful skills of daily life and social productions, further echoed the popular promotion of "good wives and wise mother." Moreover, the regulations also reflect that while women were encouraged to acquire more modern skills and knowledge, they still needed to follow certain traditional moralistic norms, such as feminine dress and behaviors codes.

Not only did the performance of *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* raise funds for women's education, but also played a significant role in influencing government supports. After the performance, in March 1907, The Department of Education of Qing government issued *Regulations for Women's Primary School* (*Nüzi xiaoxue zhangcheng* 女子小學堂章程) and *Regulations for Women's Secondary Normal School* (*Nüzi shifan xuetang zhangcheng* 女子師範學堂章程), which officially and institutionally legitimized women's education in China. One of the goals of both women's preliminary and secondary training was to cultivate their "womanly virtues" (*nüde* 女德). In the General Requirements of *Regulations for Women's Secondary Normal School*, it says "Women's

virtues in China have been valued in all dynasties, so it should be continued to be the primary focus of educating women in present day. The education should not be irreconcilable with virtuous Chinese ethical doctrines and should keep women away from decadent customs and practices” (Shu 736). In addition, classical textbooks on women’s virtue such as *Biographies of Women Exemplars*, *Instructions for Women*, and *Scripture of Female Filial Piety* were all required textbooks. This was a result from the specific historical period of time. When the Chinese society was in the process of transforming, it was so difficult to remove all the traditional moral requirements for women, which were deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Even though these regulations still valued traditional women’s morality that was defined by masculine power, they did promote women’s education in the history of Chinese society.

The image of Hui Xing portrayed in *The Story of Lady Hui Xing* reflects women’s modern adaptation and interpretation of traditional morality. As a pioneer of women’s education, while Hui Xing accepts modern ideas and knowledge, she does not reject traditional doctrines like “chastity, virtue, righteousness, and fortitude” (*zhenjie yilie* 貞節義烈). In the farewell letter to her students, Hui Xing writes, “I hope you all will obey the rules of ‘loyalty, filial piety, chastity and righteousness.’ Only in doing so, can you be beneficial to this world.” But, what should not be neglected is the fact that Hui Xing’s interpretation of these doctrines is from the perspective of women’s benefits and for the good of a better future. That’s what she learns from traditional women exemplars in the way they treat death as a way of showing determination and to make her point publicly known. Although in their struggle for emancipation, women could not totally break away from masculine orthodoxy that was deeply rooted in patriarchal power system,

exceptional women, such as Hui Xing, heroically manipulated the impact of female martyrdom in a modern context.

Conclusion

As one of the pioneers of women's education in China, Hui Xing deserves high praise and great respect. After Hui Xing's death, fund-raising activities for Zhenwen Women's School were initiated nationwide. With the publication of Hui Xing's outstanding deeds, more and more people from various circles of society began to understand the significance of women's education and to support women's schools. More and more women's schools were opened, and by 1907, there were 428 women's schools at different levels in twenty-two provinces, with a total enrollment of 15,496 students.⁴⁸ In April 1907, Zhenwen Women's School reopened, and its name was changed to Hui Xing Women's School in memory of Hui Xing. In May 1907, it already had six faculty and sixty students. The curriculum was comprised of morality cultivation, classics, history, geography, Chinese, mathematics, needlecraft, embroidery, singing and gymnastics. In addition, five Western style buildings and seven bungalows were under construction. Most amazingly, this school still exists in Hangzhou today.

My intention of taking various representations of Hui Xing, the complicated factors for her death and glorification into consideration is to better understand Hui Xing as an exceptional woman. The figure of Hui Xing was praised for promoting women's education, which was regarded as a significant solution for establishing a modern China, and therefore, she was also memorialized as a martyr who sacrificed herself for national

⁴⁸ With reference of Luo Suwen 羅蘇文, "Zhongguo diyisuo ziban nüxiaoxiao" 中國第一所自辦女校.(The First women's School Established by the Chinese).

freedom. In the name of national salvation, women had the potential to discursively violate or subvert unfair traditional women's morality, and their unconventional behaviors could be legitimized. As a distinguished example of exceptional women, Hui Xing represented a type of woman who gave attention to both traditional feminine virtues and new concepts, and who was open to new ideas but practiced within certain conventional frames. To fulfill her promises and defend her beliefs that widely establishing women's schools would help women, she heroically committed suicide in order to demand annual funds for the school. While she deployed the dynamic power of martyrdom to "open people's minds," Hui Xing turned her death into an influential weapon for her to protest the racial and moral confinement that women had suffered. In addition, in the process of publicizing Hui Xing's story and constructing Hui Xing's image, both imagination and compassion became important mental instruments for people to connect with others and to interpret the subtle relationship between individual action and the destiny of the nation. With the popularization of Hui Xing and her story, thoughts and propositions related to political reform and social transformation were articulated and reiterated through circulation. Hui Xing's image represents the interactions between China's past and present, and between China and the West. Such interactions were the special feature of Chinese modernity.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STONE OF GODDESS NÜWA

FEMINIST POWER AND THE RADICAL ACT OF KILLING

The action of preserving the right to take one's own life is one method of establishing power for women. In the name of saving the country and women, Hui Xing adapts a radical action in taking her own life to display her power and agency over death. Whether she chooses to live or die, she is acting of her own volition. To Hui Xing, her sacrifice in exchange for the survival of the women's school and their opportunities for a better future is a reasonable method to achieve her goal. Her fearlessness and readiness to die for her ideals becomes a severe threat and a potent weapon wielded against existing patriarchal authorities. Even more so, the posthumous power of death and martyrdom would generate continuous effects and have a wide spread influence.

Different from Hui Xing, other radical women take another approach to exploit the power of death. The act of killing others is another method of displaying dominance and challenging existing authority. As reflected in literary works, such as *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, instead of remaining silent, passive spectators, exceptional women, with re-interpreted *xia* 俠 spirit, work to subvert the power positions through their ability to kill and reinstate control. Their struggle is twofold. On the one hand, it seems that, generally, exceptional women support national salvation and fight for redefined social

order, which is led by patriarchal nationalists under the banner of patriotism. However, on the other hand, they reserve some concerns regarding gender roles in the cause of salvation. Even within the fight for national salvation, they still cause significant disruptions and threats to this very order when they manipulate established gender roles and use these gender roles as weapons or tools to conduct outright violent actions towards men. This juxtaposition between working along with men for national salvation and fighting against men for feminist emancipation, as well as the ambiguity of exceptional women's actions, further question the social positions, the rights, and the responsibility conventionally assigned to women.

In this chapter, I will focus on an incomplete novel, *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* (*Nüwa shi* 女媧石) (1904-1905) to explore another type of exceptional women who kill, control, and assassinate. This novel presents exceptional women who render dynamic complexities of genders, nations, and modernity, and provide an alternative perspective to the question of life and death, particularly, the power over the conditions and timing of one's own and others' deaths. My reading of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* focuses on examining why the theme of killing/assassinating was so popular within the discourses of national liberation and feminist salvation at that time; how literary works in the style of "new novels" (*xin xiaoshuo* 新小說)—"chivalric science fantasy," in the case of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*—function as effective media for promoting "new" (namely modern) ideas, as well as the circulating and shaping of exceptional women; and in what kind of ideal world exceptional women's desire to subvert the power position is achieved, and perhaps even enhanced by modern knowledge and techniques. I argue that the new womanhood presented in this novel comprehensively addresses the women's

understanding of “saving” as it relates to both national liberation and women’s emancipation from patriarchal constraint. In the name of “saving,” people tend to condone radical actions and often encourage “killing” as a justified and effective method. To re-establish their own agency in life and death, and by exploiting modern technologies to help conduct radical deeds and actions in pursuit of their doctrine and emancipation, these exceptional women indicate a societal yearning for the redistribution of power.

A Brief Summary of the Novel

The Stone of Goddess Niwa was labeled as “A Novel about Talented Ladies Saving the Nation” (*guixiu jiuguo xiaoshuo* 閨秀救國小說). Sixteen chapters of this novel were published in two issues by Dongya Bianyiju 東亞編譯局 in 1904 and 1905. It was written by Hantian Duxiaozi 海天獨嘯子 (a lone person yelling at the Horizon), whose real name is unknown, and commented by a discussant called Wohu Langshi 臥虎浪士 (roaming crouching tiger), who made comments at the end of each chapter.¹ The central protagonist is a brave, passionate lady named Jin Yaose 金瑤瑟 who has just returned to China after three years of studying in the United States. Jin Yaose is enthusiastic about progress and reform, and wishes to “save the country” (*jiuguo* 救國).

¹ According to Ellen Widmer’s study, the author and the discussant were probably both male overseas students studying in Japan during the creation of this novel. See Ellen Widmer, “Zhan Kai and Five ‘Novels of Women’s Liberation’ of the Late Qing.” Nanxiu Qian’s theory of *xianyuan* 賢媛 may support this idea. Qian believes that among all the time-honored names for writing women such as “worthy ladies” (*xianyuan* 賢媛), “full flowering of the inner chamber” (*guixiu* 閨秀), and “talented women” (*cainü* 才女), reform-minded women prefer *xianyuan*. I would like to examine the function of the commentary from the perspective of literary genre and its influences to the shaping and circulation of exceptional women images in this novel in following sections.

She blames Empress Dowager Hu 胡太后 for the plight of women. Accusing Empress Dowager Hu of betraying the country, Jin Yaose sets out to assassinate this traitor (*zheihou* 賊后). She does not succeed in killing Empress Dowager Hu, and has to flee the palace. Although her attempt fails, Jin Yaose's courageous efforts serve as a call to action and provide her with a strong reputation within the women's circle. During her travel to the Central Women's Organization 中央婦女會, Jin Yaose encounters various archetypes of exceptional women and women's groups. The novel relates the stories and experiences of these exceptional women through their interactions with Jin Yaose. Jin Yaose learns of the women's group, the "Floral Blood Party" (*Huaxue dang* 花血黨) —a large and well-organized women's group that specialized in assassination. Under the leadership of Qin Ailian 秦愛蓮, its headquarters are disguised as a brothel. Jin Yaose also learns of the "White Cross Community" (*Baishizi she* 白十字社), which operates a brainwashing hospital (*xinao yuan* 洗腦院) under the lead of a female scientist named Chu Xiangyuan 楚湘雲. Chu Xiangyun is an expert in controlling people's minds, especially the minds of corrupted men. Jin Yaose also meets a woman named Wei Shuimu 魏水母, a talented female warrior who is good at killing but only uses violence against men. The name 水母 can be translated as "mother of the water" or "jellyfish." Living as a fish woman, Wei Shuimu is good at water activities. The nickname, "Life Demolisher Dragon Lady Three" 搗命母夜叉三娘子, reveals that Wei Shuimu is a man-killer. Like jellyfish, she kills men when they begin to lower their guard and drift into her grasp. Wei Shuimu's friend, the lady Liang Cuidai 梁翠黛, aspires to more than retaliatory violence against men. Liang Cuidai's dream is to become a Joan of Arc figure and lead a group of heroines

devoted to saving the nation. The novel is unfinished, and the last plot leaves Liang Cuidai poised to take action while Jin Yaose leaves her to continue her own adventure.

The Emergence of Radical Exceptional Women:

A Sociopolitical Appeal in the Late Qing

Although it seems radical, this type of novel, with violent and radical women, was fairly common for political and literary works at the turning of twentieth century China because women were directly associated with social change. In the preface of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, the author Hantian Duxiaozi claims:

Our country is a place full of graceful landscapes. Soft delicacy and gentle elegance are always highly valued. Women's issues are usually placed at the center of people's thoughts, therefore, when promoting social changes, it is difficult to change men, but it is easy to change women. The moment when women change (or transform), the whole country will change.²

(441-2)

Hantian Duxiaozi's claim that "the whole country will change when women change/transform" 婦女一變，而全國皆變矣 reflects the highly debated relationship between gender—particularly the question of women—and the nation. The conversations on their complicated relationship were "first systematically raised in the post-1898 period in China" (Karl 212). Hantian Duxiaozi's claim identifies women as the most important agents for social change. For him, it is Chinese women who shape Chinese culture and its

² I translated all the Chinese exceptions from *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* (*Nüwa shi* 女媧石). The Chinese edition I used for this chapter is in *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo daxi* 中國近代小說大系 (A compendium of modern Chinese literature), Vol. 25.

national character. If women are not changed, nothing can change. Haitian Duxiaozi directly comments on the power and degree of agency that women could possess in that relationship. The word *bian* 變, which can be translated as “to change” or “to transform,” has long been highlighted in political expressions, such as “to initiate political reform, to revise the law, regulations, or rules” (*bianfa* 變法), in Chinese history. At the turning of the twentieth century, *bian* 變 became the trend of the whole world, and it was directly connected with the question of national life and death. As Chinese scholar Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854-1921) stated in his articles, “On the Speed of World Change” (*Lun shibian zhiji* 論世變之亟) and “On our Salvation” (*Jiuwang juehun* 救亡決論), “the whole world is rapidly changing at an unprecedented speed since the Qing dynasty”³ and “this is the indisputable fact and the dominating trend, so today’s China is facing certain death unless there is change.”⁴ The emphasis of *bian* 變 in these statements articulates the strong hopes and desires that Chinese people fostered through the ongoing process of social change and modernization. The question concerning how society should change though, has brought the issues of women and the fate of the nation into contention.

³ In 1985, Yan Fu published several influential essays in *Zhibao* 直報, a Chinese newspaper founded in Tianjin by the German Constantin von Hanneken (1854-1925). In “On the Speed of World Change” (*Lun shibian zhiji* 論世變之亟), Yan Fu emphasizes the trend of rapid change in the world.

⁴ In “On our Salvation” (*Jiuwang juehun* 救亡決論), Yan Fu elaborates on the importance of change. The Chinese sentence was written as “天下理之最明, 而勢所必主者, 如今日中国不變法則必亡是已.” I do not translate *bianfa* 變法 as “political reform” because this English expression cannot convey Yan Fu’s concept on *fa* 法, which have multiple meanings including “law,” “reasons,” “principles,” “rules,” “codes” and more.

Re-reading Traditional Female Knights-errant (nüxia 女俠)

Literati had various opinions about the relationship between Chinese women and the nation. Some male reformers claimed that women's physical and mental wellness played crucial roles in the process of producing a wealthy and healthy nation. Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), for example, regarded the lack of education for Chinese women as the foundation of national weakness and a major detriment to the development of the nation ("On Women's Education" 189-203). Jin Tianhe 金天翮 (1874-1947) believed that women were the "mothers of the nation," so as a solution, he encouraged the emancipation of women through the enrichment and cultivation of themselves ("Women's Bell" 207-85). While those nationalists focused on the relationship between female literacy and national empowerment, some revolutionaries held "different visions of how that [national] crisis should be resolved—through bloodshed, redemption, national utilitarianism and gradual reform" and articulated their views "through divergent representations of heroic women" (Judge, *The Precious Raft of History* 177). As a result, more and more political activists began to re-read and reinterpret the stories of female warriors (*nüjiang* 女將 or *nüzhanshi* 女戰士), such as Hua Mulan 花木蘭 and Liang Hongyu 梁紅玉. They also wrote articles and poems in praise of the national heroism of *nüxia* 女俠 and their ambitions and ardor. One of the important women's journals, *Women's World* (*Nüzi shijie* 女子世界) (1904-1907) highly praised brave and distinguished Chinese women in history with the expectations that "the dearest and closest twenty million fellow-women" could inherit and carry forward glorious traditions, so that women could be cultivated into "women soldiers, women knights-errant, and

women literati, who will struggle and survive as long as they are alive in the twentieth century.”⁵

Fully supporting such advocacy, the famous poet, Liu Yazi 柳亞子 (1887-1958), published many articles in the journal of *Women's World* (*Nüzi shijie* 女子世界). Using a feminine penname, “A woman from Songling named Pan Xiaohuang” (*Songling nüzi Pan Xiaohuang* 松齡女子潘小璜),⁶ Liu wrote an article, “The Biographies of Chinese Swordswomen Hongxian and Nie Yinniang” 中國女劍俠紅線、聶隱娘傳. In this article, he not only spoke highly of *xia* people but also glorified them as excellent exemplars for Chinese women to learn heroic characteristics and join the cause of national salvation. Liu wrote:

Who is Lady of Yue (Yue Nü 越女)?⁷ Who are Pang E 龐娥,⁸ Sister Nie

⁵ The chief editor of *Women's World* was Ding Chuwo 丁初我. In the first issue on January 1904, Ding published an article “Ode to Women's World” (*Nüzi Shijie songci* 女子世界頌詞). Jin Yi 金一 (Jin Tianhe 金天翮) wrote “Introducing the *Women's World*” (*Nüzi Shijie fakanci* 《女子世界》發刊詞).

⁶ Liu Yazi had many pennames in his career. For the articles published in *Women's World*, he used the penname “A woman from Songling named Pan Xiaohuang” published “Zhongguo nüjianxia Hongxian, Nie Yinniang 中國女劍俠紅線、聶隱娘傳,” “Zhongguo minzu zhuyi nüjunren Liang Hongyu zhuan 中國民族主義女軍人梁紅玉傳” (The biography of Chinese nationalist woman soldier Liang Hongyu), and “Wei minzu liuxue wuming zhi nüjie zhuan 為民族流血無名之女傑傳” (The biography of a nameless extraordinary woman who bled for the nation). Liu also used the penname Yalu 亞盧 published “Nüxiong tanxie 女雄談屑” (Endless talks on heroines), and “Zhongguo diyi nühaojie junrenjia Hua Mulan zhuan 中國第一女豪傑女軍人家花木蘭傳” (China's foremost exceptional woman soldier Hua Mulan).

⁷ Yue Nü 越女 was a swordswoman in the state of Yue. Because of her excellent skills and mastery on the art of the sword, the King Goujian of Yue 越王勾踐 (496-465 BCE) appointed her to train and instruct his army.

⁸ The story of Pang E 龐娥 was written in the version of *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienü Zhuan* 列女傳) written by Huang Pumi 皇甫謐. Pang E's father was killed by Li Shou. Although the three brothers of Pang planned to enact revenge against Li Shou, they all died of illness. Since then, Pang E began to prepare an attack on Li

(Nie Zi 聂姊),⁹ Mother Lü from Haiqu 海曲吕母?¹⁰ Who are Joan of Arc and Sophia? People like them, who can unexpectedly appear everywhere, easily kill people in busy markets, act unpredictably, and suspect everything including Ghosts, Buddha, Gods, and Immortals, are not Gods or Immortals; they are called *xia* 侠. Pan Xiaohuang says, China, two thousand years ago, was a *xia* country, and Chinese people, two thousand years ago, were *xia* people. *Xia* people, are only second to the Saints. They are the friends of scholars and the enemies of imperial authorities and officials. They value commitments regardless of life and death. They spend fortunes to make friends, and they will do everything for their confidants. They act without hesitation and they die without regrets. It is all because of *xia* people and *xia* spirit that we can appreciate heroic

Shou and finally killed him in a crowded marketplace. Immediately, she cut off Li Shou's head and gave herself up to the local government. Although she committed a crime, she was granted a pardon because of her brave action out of the revenge for her father's death and the defense of the family honor. There was a similar story for Lady Nüxiu of Qin 秦女休, both arouses the interests of many male scholars. Zuo Yannian 左延年 wrote a poem entitled *Qin Nüxiu xing* 秦女休行 (the heroic action of Qin Nüxiu). Fu Xuan 傅玄 (217-278) of Jin dynasty, based on her story, rewrites it as a filial daughter of Pang family, who takes revenge for her father, and Fu Xuan praises her as "the heroic woman of Pang family" (Pangshi liefu 龐氏烈婦). Both stories, together with a poem written by Li Bai 李白 (701-762) with the same title *Qin Nüxiu xing* 秦女休行 (the heroic action of Qin Nüxiu) are collected in *Yuefu Shijie* 樂府詩集 (Music Bureau Poems, Songs and Lyrics Collection) (11th century-12th century) edited by Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩.

⁹ Nie Zi 聂姊 refers to Nie Yinniang 聶隱娘.

¹⁰ Lü Mu 吕母 (?-18AD) was the first female rebel leader in Chinese history. After her son Lü Yu 呂育 was executed by the government for a minor offense, she started a peasant uprising against Wang Mang's Xin dynasty 王莽新政. After she died of an illness, her followers became a major force of the Red Eyebrows Rebellions, which played a significant role in the downfall of the Xin dynasty and the restoration of the Han dynasty by Liu Xiu 劉向, the Emperor Guangwu of Han 漢光武帝.

stories that can startle the universe.

Liu sublimated his praise of *xia* spirit into the laud of *xia* people as a figure that is “only second to the Saints” 俠者，聖之亞也. Such glorification granted *xia* a kind of divinity that deserves acknowledgement, laudableness, and an active continuation of that inheritance. He also claimed that *xia* was a national characteristic of China and Chinese people, which legitimized *nǚxia* 女俠 as a cultural component that was deeply rooted in Chinese history. Through emphasizing *xia* people as courageous and responsible social actors, Liu encouraged women to learn from women knights-errant, like Hong Xian and Nie Yinniang, in the way that they acted heroically and straightforwardly. Moreover, by comparing Chinese female swordswomen and knights-errant with French heroine Joan of Arc and Russian nihilist Sophia, Liu granted these female swordswomen and knights-errant people an international spiritual connection. As a result, the glory of western female revolutionaries and their magnificent images were projected onto Chinese female knights-errant, which associated “female knights-errant” with the fate of “the nation,” and the former also became an emblem of a strong nation.

In fact, a close examination of the Chinese and foreign women mentioned in Liu’s article reveals that, along with extolling their bravery and dauntlessness, it was their toughness and fierceness that impressed Liu most. Yue Nǚ was regarded as a reincarnation of Jiutian Xuannǚ 九天玄女 (the Mysterious Lady of Nine Heavens)—a goddess who ruled over sexuality, longevity, and war. Pang E cut off her enemy’s head without fear or hesitation. Mother Lǚ and Joan of Arc were both admired for leading mighty armies across the battlefields, shedding their blood. Each of these women demonstrated determination of fulfilling her duties through violence and forcefulness. In

order to make his advocacy more compatible and reliable, Liu also borrowed a female identity. By confirming a kind of gender identification and by situating himself/herself as a member of women, Liu proposed that women should work together with all energies in order to destroy (*dao* 搗) the corrupted authority and make determined efforts for the salvation of the nation. The character *dao* 搗, which can be translated as “to disturb, attack, destroy, or smash,” highlighted a sense of stirring up existing structures and norms with force. Therefore, what Liu truly wished was that women could transform into modern knights-errant—exceptional women—through integrating both nationalist determinations and the *xia* spirit featured with courageousness and aggressiveness. In other words, not only do women need to act, but also act violently and radically.

Aligning with the viewpoints of scholars like Liu Yazi, the author of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, Hantian Duxiaozi, also viewed the emergence of modern female knights-errant (*nüxia* 女俠) as a necessity, even a call from society. Compared to scholars who promoted the more peaceful and elegant womanhood, he endorsed a more violent and direct display of passions and efforts to save the country. In *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, Haitian Duxiaozi intended to convey his endorsement of radical actions by transforming traditional *xia* spirit into a national spirit, which was an essential characteristic of modern exceptional women who were politically motivated and talented in assassinating and killing in the cause of national salvation.

Most of the exceptional women in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* believe that they can save the country through radical actions like killing. It seems counter intuitive to link “killing” with “saving” and “salvation.” However, killing does denote a power dynamic. From the power dynamics perspective, the question “to kill or to save” connotes at least

two levels of power. On the one hand, it assumes that the person who is facing this question has the power to make the decision over other people's lives. But on the other hand, in the process of killing or saving them, the person who is carrying out this mission also has the power to make his/her own choices; at least, he/she has the possibility to intervene or influence the result. Examples of such people, these prospective interventionists, are the *xia* people. The connection between "killing" and "saving" is, in fact, better understood through *xia* spirit.

As Liu Yazi demonstrated, *xia*, as a profound cultural element, provided a great agent for intellectuals to promote political awareness and mobilize ordinary people to participate in the discourse of salvation. The appeal for the emergence of exceptional women was integrated with the revolutionary discourses, such as "survival," "struggle," and "salvation." Under such sociopolitical influence, images of traditional women began to transform into iron-willed women warriors with a kind of determined gesture, ready to sacrifice themselves. Such a gesture was the result of adaptively inheriting the morality and philosophy—*bao* 報 (reciprocity, to pay back), which was an important feature of *xia* spirit. The spirit of *xia*, usually described as *xiayi* 俠義 (the sense of righteousness and duty), is closely related to the action of behaving bravely for a just cause and sacrificing oneself to protect others. Its practical social functions, namely to fulfill one's duty or to repay an obligation at the price of self-sacrifice, as well as to act violently in order to protect and help others, are transformed into varied understandings of the *xia* spirit in classic and popular literature. Generally speaking, *xia* spirit is closely related to the concept of *bao* 報 (reciprocity), including *bao en* 報恩 (to return a favor) and an opposite concept of *bao chou* 報仇 (to take revenge on the enemy or to avenge a

wrongful event). The ways to return a favor or to avenge a wrongful event are not limited to material means; rather, it involves different forms that symbolize a higher payback, like sacrificing one's life if the situation requires. While the notion of "returning a favor" (*bao en* 報恩) is related to the *xia*'s generosity and loyalty, the concept of revenge is tied to the *xia*'s radical sense of justice and fairness.

Generally speaking, because *xia* people represent a type of powerful people who can surpass traditional ethics and morals with good wills, ordinary people tend to take *xia* people's subversively radical actions as their spiritual substance. Therefore, as Roland Altenburger has pointed out, in most of *xia* literature, "[t]he practice of revenge has become identified as the most typical pattern of *xia* behavior" (29). At late Qing, because the national crisis became so urgent, personal enmities, resentment or hatred, pains or sorrows, were transformed into national concerns. Literary representations of women also began to integrate traditional concepts of revenge, loyalty, and righteousness with discourses of revolution, struggle, and sacrifice, which contributed to the images of exceptional women much received by the public.

Moreover, in the process of shaping depictions of these women, the active desires to fulfill personal debts of gratitude and revenges as well as the characteristics of loyalty, fidelity, and chivalry were all elevated as prerequisites for national salvation. Literarily, the purpose of *bao* 報 is "to kill" or "to take a life," whereas the aim of *jiu* 救 is "to save" or "to let one live." However, in the discourse of "devoting oneself to the country" (*baoguo* 報國), when the ultimate achievement is "to save the country" (*jiuguo* 救國), the two paradoxical concepts are subtly integrated with each other, because in the name of "saving," the action of "killing" is justified as a necessary and effective method. In

Chinese, the terms for “killing” are more nuanced and have different connotations. The common word *sha* 殺 connotes a broader concept of killing. In *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, “to eliminate” (*mie* 滅) and “to assassinate” (*cisha* 刺殺 or *ansha* 暗殺) are more commonly used. The word “elimination” (*mie* 滅) points to more generalized objects, and it connotes a sense of rejection with disapproval and resentment. Meanwhile, the word “assassination” points to more direct targets and expresses a sense of determination. In the late Qing period, these words became more complicated in the discourse of modernity because the *xia* spirit featured violence and performed through active revenge was connected with the national discourse. Moreover, the proliferation of these terms was also associated with the involvement of foreign influence. Whereas “elimination” was emphasized during the Boxer Movement (*yihetuan yundong* 義和團運動), as in the slogan “destroy the foreigners” (*meiyang* 滅洋), the word “assassination” (*cisha* 刺殺 or *ansha* 暗殺) was popularized with the introduction of heroic Western exceptional women.

The Stories of Heroic Western Women

With the popularity of the re-examination of historical heroines, more and more heroic foreign women were introduced into China. Their stories further enforced the endorsement of assassination. Among these Western exceptional women, the two most popular radical women were Joan of Arc, who was considered as a heroine of France, and Russian nihilist Sophia Perovskaya, who was notorious for the attempted assassination of Tsar Alexander II. Based on Japanese works on Joan of Arc, Chinese intellectuals translated and rewrote the story of this heroine by highlighting her selfless sacrifice for

saving the nation as a responsible citizen. Influential works included *The Legend of a Woman Saving the Nation* (*Nüzi jiuguo meitan* 女子救國美談), which was also called *The Biography of Joan of Arc* (*Zhen De zhuan* 貞德傳) by Feng Ziyou 馮自由¹¹ and *The Biography of French Exceptional Woman Joan of Arc who Fought for National Salvation* (*Faguo jiuwang nüjie Ruo An Zhuan* 法國救亡女傑若安傳) by Mei Zhu 梅鑄.¹² In these works, Joan of Arc was shaped as a patriot who was well aware of the responsibility of a citizen and swore to die for the nation in order to save the people. Moreover, by praising Joan of Arc's patriotic behaviors, they also advocated national martial spirit (*shangwu* 尚武) among Chinese women and encouraged them to join the army (*congrong* 從戎).

Compared with Joan of Arc, Sophia Pervskaya received more attention. *Min Bao* 民報 (the Citizen) not only published "The Biography of Sophia" (*Su Feiya zhuan* 蘇菲亞傳) but also designed a special issue named "Su Feiya hao" 蘇菲亞號 (the special issue for Sophia). In this issue, Sophia's stories, especially her attempt to assassinate the Tsar, was highlighted and praised. Consequently, some radical political activists began to promote and practice the idea of assassination. They firmly believed that this was an expedient means of achieving political goals. As one of the most prominent imported cultural icons, Sophia became very popular in both historical and fictional representations. Not only was Sophia's story of life and death circulated in the debates on women's public role, but the glamour of sacrifice and moral attributes associated with her

¹¹ When *The Legend of a Woman Saving the Nation* was published by Xinmin She 新民主社 in 1902, Feng Ziyou used the penname of Recheng aiguo ren 熱誠愛國人 (a passionate patriot). There were several translations for Joan of Arc. *Zhen De* 貞德 was the most popular one and it is still used nowadays.

¹² *Ruo An* 若安 was another Chinese translation for Joan of Arc.

actions of assassination drew the attention of Chinese intellectuals. Since then, the name of Sophia (Su Feiya), her stories, and the theme of assassination appeared in many novels.

Both the images of Joan of Arc and Sophia, their radical actions of fighting and killing, and the beliefs in martial spirit were reflected in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*. In addition, with the consideration of China's history and the author Haitian Duxiaozi's own expectations for a new womanhood, he integrated various representations of women in this novel. He intended, as he explained in the preface, "to collect portrayals of diverse female talents, including the beautiful, the martial, the intelligent, the humorous, and the scholarly to create an ideal 'Kingdom of Women' (*nüzi guo* 女子國) (442; preface). To achieve this purpose, the author created a "chivalric science fantasy" which featured the circulation of various radical women images and character-oriented fiction commentary. Its hybrid quality provided a very useful and effective vehicle for the author to convey his ideals.

The Novel of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*:

The Hybrid Quality and the Shaping of Exceptional Women

In this section, I would like to explore hybridity and its influence on shaping the exceptional women in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* in three aspects: the creation of "chivalric science fantasy," the circulation and transformation of famous Chinese and foreign radical images of women, and the function of character-oriented fiction commentary.

The Creation of Chivalric Science Fantasy

In terms of genre, by calling *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* a “chivalric science fantasy,” I intend to stress that this novel has a hybrid nature since it incorporates both the features of *xiayi xiaoshuo* 俠義小說 (chivalric fiction, knights-errant novel) and those of science fantasy. This hybrid quality contributes to the promotion of a modernized womanhood that accommodates the *xia* spirit with the knowledge, the imagination, and the fabulation. In order to explore this hybrid quality in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, it is important to know the influences and receptions of chivalric fictions and science fantasy in late Qing. I would like to discuss these two genres, respectively.

At the turning of the twentieth century, with the promotion of “new novel” (*xin xiaoshuo* 新小說) initiated by Liang Qichao, chivalric fictions switched the focus to “encourage *xia*’s spirit, and provide instructions about how to act in accordance with *xia* and morality, with loyalty to the people and the love for the nation” 演任俠好義忠群愛國之旨 (Xia Min, “Xinxin xiaoshuo xunli” 124-5). Magazines even appeared with “*xiake* as a doctrine and each volume ma[d]e *xiake* the main characters.”¹³ The literary portraits of *xia* and their actions were interpreted as the practices of politicized national allegories. The themes, “to devote to the country” (*bao guo* 報國) and “to save the country” (*jiuguo* 救國), were generally emphasized in literatures which “encourage developing martial

¹³ In “*Xinxin xiaoshuo tebai* 《新新小說》特白” (Special preface to the magazine of *New New Novels*), Xia Min 俠民 presented such claim. Xia Min was the one of the pennames of Gong Ziying 龔子英. Chinese scholar Guo Haofan 郭浩帆 believes that it is highly possible that Xia Min (Gong Ziying) and Chen Jinghan 陳景韓, whose penname was Leng Xie 冷血, together served as the chief editors of the magazine of *New New Novels*. The article “*Xinxin xiaoshuo tebai* 《新新小說》特白” was published in *Xinxin xiaoshuo* 新新小說 (New New Novel), Vol 3, 1904.

virtue and *xia* spirit” 鼓吹武德，提振俠風。¹⁴ As a result, chivalric fictions characterized by *xia* spirit became more popular because they were closely associated with the discourse of nationalism.

However, not all modern scholars agree on the representations of *xia* spirit and the social influences of chivalric fictions. For instance, when Lu Xun 魯迅 compared the quality of *The Dreams of the Red Chamber* and *The Water Margin* with that of the knight-errant novels produced in the Late Qing, he did not think highly of the latter. In his book *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (*Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilüe* 中國小說史略), taking *The Heroic Sons and Daughters* (*Ernü yingxiong zhuang* 兒女英雄傳) and *The Three Heroes and Five Gallants* (*Sanxia wuyi* 三俠五義) as examples, Lu Xun claims, “they praise the conduct of radical heroic acts of justice to be in line with the feudal concepts of loyalty and right” (195). For Lu Xun, such illustrations violate the original *xia* 俠 spirit, which, in his perception, should not be shackled by orthodox ideologies.

Petrus Liu, however, praises chivalric fictions and considers “this genre as an interventionist and progressive cultural movement in the twentieth-century Chinese intellectual history that invented the most important model of *nonstatist* political responsibility” (5). David Wang also believes that, along with court-case fiction, the chivalric fiction “marks a radical rethinking of legitimacy, whether imperial or ideological,” and that “its appearance addressed emphatically society’s urgent need to reconfigure its political and judicial powers” (*Fin-de-Siecle Splendor* 120-1). These scholars, no matter whether they praise chivalric fictions or not, all acknowledge the

¹⁴ See Man Shu 曼殊, “*Xiaoshuo conghua* 小說叢話” (Collected comments on novels) in *Xin xiaoshuo* 新小說 (New Fiction), Vol 15, 1905.

political functions of this genre. My intention is not to discuss whether chivalric fictions have political influence, but rather to explore, within this established discourse, how the genre of chivalric fictions served as a useful platform in promoting modern political and social thoughts in the novel of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, specifically.

The author of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, Haitian Duxiaozi, showed much enthusiasm on the literary portraits of *xia* and chivalric fiction. In the preface, he highly praises *The Water Margin* (*Shuihu Zhuan* 水滸傳) because it is full of heroic swordsmen, whose heroic spirit and quality (*yingxiong qi* 英雄氣) closely relates to national integrity (*minqi* 民氣). Unfortunately, women lack such heroic spirit. Because women are the real power that is holding the country back, it is important to write new chivalric novels to transform them. Haitian Duxiaozi also believes that in order to initiate women's reform, not only do women have to be indoctrinated with the chivalric spirit (*wuxia sixiang* 武俠思想), but also need to be updated with the newest knowledge and wisdom (*zuixin zhishi* 最新智識) (442, preface). Traditional chivalric fiction, however, could not encompass all these demands. The transfiguration and development of *xiayi* novels of the Qing dynasty were constrained by multiple aspects, such as literary traditions, the cultural background, political atmosphere, psychology of readers, and the media that were used to publish the works. It was also because of the influence of these aspects, literati had to seek more possible ways to convey their modern ideas and to attract readership. It seems that, for Haitian Duxiaozi, to incorporate the features of popular new genres—like science fiction/fantasy—with traditional writings on the theme of *xiayi* was a possible solution. He argues, when he emphasizes the urgent need of reforming the novel, that the time of political reform is also the moment to revitalize the novel with new content and new

knowledge.¹⁵

Among all the genres featured with characteristics of “new fiction,” science fantasy, in David Wang’s opinion, is the one that bears the clear imprint of modernity. These works not only are rich in indigenous utopian traditions, but also provide the readers with knowledge of Western concepts that allow for experimentation of inspiring ideas within literary modernity. Science fiction/fantasy enjoyed immense popularity among late Qing writers and readers. It emerged as a genre in nineteenth-century Europe. By the end of the nineteenth century, science fiction/fantasy had become one of the most popular genres, not only among Western readers, but also among Chinese readers. Translations of works by authors like Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, science fiction/fantasy written by Chinese authors like Liang Qichao and Wu Jianren, and more such types of works published in such fiction magazines as *New Fiction* (*Xin Xiaoshuo* 新小說) and *Fiction Forest* (*Xiaoshuolin* 小說林) all proved this genre’s positive reception. I prefer to use the term “science fantasy” as defined by David Wang to discuss *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* because Wang’s term emphasizes “the portion of late Qing fiction that derives its power from narrating outlandish entities and illusory events in such a way as to stimulate the reader’s fancy at both the imaginative and the epistemological levels” (*Fin-de-siècle Splendor* 253). Additionally, it is because the characteristics of “fantasy”—“the impossible” and “the conceivable”—not only deal with “human realities,” but also have “a *reality-oriented function* despite the self-conceived irreality of its hypotheses and conceptions” (Fredericks 37). In other words, science fantasy offers a

¹⁵ Haitian Duxiaozi discusses the benefits of novels in the preface of a translated Japanese novel named *Kongzhong feiting* 空中飛艇 (The airship). See “*Kongzhong feiting* bianyan,” 90.

tool for literati to make comments on important political and social issues by integrating scientifically supernatural, futuristic, or fantasy elements into both their works and the readers' imagination, so that they can make whatever is improbable possible.

Although spatio-temporal environments—the outer space, the moon, or the future world—were not the focus of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, it does contain scenarios that are often unbelievable or unimaginable in Chinese society at that time. The leader of Floral Blood Party, Madame Qin, is actually an excellent inventor. The Heaven Fragrant Courtyard, where the headquarters of the Floral Blood Party is located, is equipped with electrical cars, trains, and elevators. Within this large courtyard, there are thousands of rooms designed like a women's school with classrooms, study rooms, musical training rooms, science labs and dormitories, where women get educated and trained. Women who live there do not eat normal meals, instead, they sit on chairs and drink the liquid produced by a food processor. Besides the application of inventions for daily life, women are also equipped with futuristic weapons and methods of warfare. Among the ten inventions of the Floral Blood Party, Madame Qin favors the “electronic horse” (*dianma* 電馬) that can travel more than two thousand miles in one day, and the upgraded gun with bullets that are made of pure explosives and can produce four hundred and sixty three times the gas when it shoots into the sky. Another women's organization, White Cross Community, is also good at the application of modern technologies. Women of this organization use an electronic flying device—a special balloon equipped with detector and telescope—to monitor their territory. They also have a brain washing machine that can purify almost everyone's brain. The imagination involved in these incredible applications of knowledge and technologies reflects the introduction of Western science

fiction. It also provides another dimension to shape exceptional women with affiliation to science and rationality in “an imaginary counter-structure” (Federicks 37). As Catherine Vance Yeh has stated, “Science and ideology go hand in hand in laying the ground for a strong China joining a future global modernity” (247). In *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, the author created a new womanhood that integrated both the techniques of anarchist assassins and the spirit of knights-errant with modern savvy.

Haitian Duxiaozi hybridized the political features of chivalric fiction and the characteristics of modernity in science fantasy into the creation of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*. Such a hybrid not only situated traditional *xia* into a modern context, but also provided a medium for various images of women—traditional and modern, in China and from abroad—to be integrated and collaborated into the shaping of exceptional women.

The Circulation and Transformation of Famous Radical Women

The central exceptional women of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* were mixed with popular Chinese and foreign radical women who developed international *xia* spirit, which further contributed to the circulation and transformation of these women and the promotion of women’s power in killing and manipulation.

The images of various exceptional women in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* project the transformation of traditional *nüxia* 女俠 (female knights-errant, female assassins, swordswomen) and the appropriation of Western female assassins. The *nüxia* tradition and the new images of Western female assassins together contributed to the creation of new womanhood. This new womanhood inherits the rebellious tradition of female knights-errant; therefore, women are more confident in their power and strength in

challenging the authority through the action of “killing.” For these radical women, the rulers—including the conventional masters in gendered power relations—are the sources of social problems and the nation’s degraded condition. If the act of committing suicide is a way of resisting a sovereign’s power over life, then the desire to kill the sovereign exhibits determination to destroy the sovereign’s power over life. Unlike traditional female knights-errant who display their abilities by fighting against the injustice or evil out of personal resentment, Jin Yaose and her sisters pursue a higher purpose—to sacrifice themselves for a better nation and the “freedom” for women. In all cases, it is moral judgment and gender conflicts, not sovereign power nor modern law regulations as Foucault has discussed, that influence the act of killing. These radical women declare a “war” against whomever threatens the realization of a better future—but not on behalf of the “right of death” of the sovereign power or legal authority, rather under the name of securing a better way of life for women and the nation.

The central character Jin Yaose in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* is a hybrid of several popular radical women of that time. First, Jin Yaose partially projects the story of a radical Chinese female revolutionary, a modern *nüxia*, Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875?-1907), who demonstrates her interpretation of *nüxia* spirit and the important role of the female assassin in her own life. Qiu Jin’s original given name was Guijin 閏瑾, and her courtesy name was Xuanqing 璇卿 (Guo Yanli 8).¹⁶ Both names have a close relationship with traditional requirements for the female, because *gui* 閏 indicates the small door of the boudoir for an unmarried lady, which separates women from the outside world; and *xuan*

¹⁶ Chinese scholar Guo Yanli 郭延裡, has conducted a comparatively thorough research on Qiu Jin’s life and his book *Qiu Jin yanjiu ziliao* 秋瑾研究資料 (Research materials on Qiu Jin) provides many historical information about Qiu Jin.

璇 means fine jade, which is a supreme compliment to women who behold traditional female moral excellence. When she studied in Japan, Qiu Jin changed her given name to Jin 瑾, and changed her courtesy name to Jingxiong 競雄, which literally means “to compete with the (male) heroes.” More determinedly, she took Jianhu Nüxia 鑒湖女俠 (woman knight-errant of the Mirror lake) and Hanxia Nü’er 漢俠女兒 (daughter of Han/Chinese knight) as her sobriquets. As a feminist who rejected conventional femininity subordinated by male domination, Qiu Jin “identified [herself] with a relatively more marginal position: the role of *xia*” to try to “narrow the gap between assigned role and perceived self” (Hu Y, “How Can a Daughter ...?” 260). That is to say, Qiu Jin hoped to “have her life to play out on a larger stage than the domestic sphere allotted to women, or even the somewhat expanded cultural arena traditionally granted to the learned woman” (Ibid, 260-1). To further prove that she could take on social and national responsibilities, Qiu Jin joined Tongmeng Hui 同盟會 (United League), as she shared their visions of saving China from the corrupt Qing government and foreign invaders. Qiu Jin continued to cooperate with them after she returned to China in 1905, and she also worked actively on planning and participating in assassination actions until she was arrested and executed on the charge of rebellion and assassination.

Qiu Jin redefines and embodies the concepts of *nüxia* and *xia* spirit through her ability to kill. More importantly, Qiu Jin’s philosophy of life and her experiences encouraged more and more Chinese women to reject patriarchal confines and to rebel. Jin Yaose, the leading figure in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, is one such woman. Like Qiu Jin, Jin Yaose is a brilliant and open-minded lady. Full of “patriotic hot blood” (*aiguo rexue* 愛國熱血), she is eager to “shoulder the national responsibility” 擔起國家重任

and “avenge the national humiliation with blood” 赤洗國民之恥 (Ch. 2). Whereas Qiu Jin goes to Japan to study new knowledge, Jin Yaose studies in America for three years. After returning to China, they are both enthusiastic to establish organizations to help Chinese women and save the country.

Besides the true story of Qiu Jin, the diverse Chinese representations of Russian nihilist Sophia Pervskaya also influenced the image of Jin Yaose. David Wang thinks that the image of Jin Yaose (*The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*) is more like a continuous image of Hua Mingqing (*The Exceptional Woman from Eastern Europe*) in the sense that what would happened to Hua Mingqing is “finally shifted to China” (*Fin-de-Siecle Splendor* 167). But, I find that Jin Yaose shares more similarities with the two versions of Sophia: Su Feiya in *The Exceptional Woman from Eastern Europe* and Xia Yali in *The Flower in the Sea of Sin*.

Since the introduction and popularization of Sophia Pervskaya in China, Sophia and her story have been circulated and transformed in many literary representations. The most famous representation of Sophia was *The Exceptional Woman from Eastern Europe* (Dong’ou nü haojie 東歐女豪傑) (1902-03) written by Luo Pu 羅普, under a female penname of “A Lady With Feather Clothes from Lingnan” (Lingnan Yuyi Nüshi 嶺南羽衣女士).¹⁷ In this novel, the story of an exceptional heroic Russian woman, Su Feiya, is narrated through the eyes of Hua Mingqing 華明卿, a Chinese girl adopted by an American missionary. Although born in a wealthy and elite family, Su Feiya 蘇菲亞 does

¹⁷ *The Exceptional Woman from Eastern Europe* was published in New Fiction (*Xin Xiaoshuo* 新小说) in serials from 1902 to 1903. The author used the penname of “A lady with feather clothes from Lingnan,” but most scholars believed that the author was a student of Liang Qichao 梁啟超 named Luo Pu 羅普.

not want to be confined by her social status. Instead, leading a group of nihilists, she establishes an organization named, “Revolutionary League” (*geming tuan* 革命團). They give public speeches and organize political activities in order to call the people to fight against dictatorship and sovereignty. This novel is incomplete with only five chapters published. It ends with the plot that Su Feiya is meeting with other revolutionary members after she is rescued from prison.

Adapted from the same figure of Sophia Pervskaya, the story about Xia Yali 夏雅麗 in the novel *The Flower in the Sea of Sin* (*Nie Hai Hua* 孽海花) (1904), written by Zeng Pu 曾樸, is more complete. In *The Flower in the Sea of Sin*, Xia Yali is also a political activist. In order to get money to fund her revolutionary party, she gives up her true love and marries a rich, but counterrevolutionary duke. Soon after the marriage, Xia Yali kills him but disguises the killing as a homicide case resulting from an intruder. Later, she bribes a chief-servant in the Palace and enters it. In the disguise of a maid, Xia Yali attempts to assassinate the Tsar by bombing. She loses her arms when the guard stops her from igniting the bomb, and she is caught immediately. Finally, she is hung on the gallows in public.

Like Su Feiya and Xia Yali, Jin Yaose also believes saving the world is her duty (*kairan yi jiushi ziren* 慨然以救世自任), and determines the best way to achieve her goal is to destroy the monarchy—the symbol and cause of national deterioration. In the case of Xia Yali, it is the Tsar, and for Jin Yaose, it is Empress Dowager Hu (a woman who has taken on a man’s role). In their assassinations, they adopt similar techniques. Xia Yali enters the palace of the Tsar in the disguise of a maid; Jin Yaose also pretends to be a singing girl in order to get close to Empress Dowager Hu. Xia Yali attempts to kill the

Tsar with a bomb, whereas Jin Yaose's weapons are more dramatically characterized with modern technology. In order to assassinate Empress Dowager Hu, Jin Yaose disguises herself as a Japanese entertainer and comes to the Palace. One night, Jin Yaose sneaks into Empress Dowager Hu's sleeping room. She draws out a pair of ivory chopsticks, inside of which there is an electronic device. Jin Yaose plans to release the electronic device to kill Empress Dowager Hu. However, Empress Dowager Hu suddenly wakes up and sees Jin Yaose standing by her bed, so Jin Yaose pretends that she comes to offer the special gift—ivory chopsticks. Before she leaves, she feels that Empress Dowager Hu is probably asleep, so she brings out some explosive powder. However, while she prepares to blow up this room, Empress Dowager Hu wakes up again. Jin Yaose has to give the powder to Empress Dowager Hu and tells her that the powders are an elixir.¹⁸ Later, it turns out that the cunning Empress Dowager Hu detects a sense of strangeness and finds out these are bombs, so she gives an order to catch Jin Yaose.

The Stone of Goddess Niwa creates a Chinese version of highly unconventional and iconoclastic womanhood through the depiction of Jin Yaose. The image of Jin Yaose is mixed with both the fragments of modern Chinese female knights-errant and the influence of Western female assassins. From Qiu Jin to various Chinese literary images of Sophia (Su Feiya and Xia Yali), their stories are circulated and recreated via the image of Jin Yaose. The author particularly hybridizes these popular radical women into the shaping of a new womanhood with the intention to educate the readers about diverse

¹⁸ The literary representation of this assassinate attempt is actually adapted from a historical fact. In 1901, Yang Yulin 楊毓麟 (1872-1911), a radical political activist and the leader of overseas students assassinate group, planned to place bombs either within the Forbidden City or the Summer Palace. Yang designed a dozen of explosives hoping to bomb both Empress Dowager Cixi and the major officials. However, these places were heavily guarded, so Yang Yulin had to give up this plan.

exemplary women around them and further guide them to respond positively and act passionately. To better communicate with the readers, the commentary of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* functioned as meaningful assistance.

The Interpretation of Exceptional Women **in the Character-centered Fiction Commentary**

When it was published, *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* contained the fiction commentary made by Wohu Langshi, who seemed to know the author, Haitian Duxiaozi, well. These commentaries not only assisted in shaping the exceptional women within this novel, but also provided a channel to communicate with the readers and a framework to guide them.

David L. Rolston, in his book, *Traditional Chinese Fiction and Fiction Commentary*, points out that, fiction commentators were not only interested in increasing the readership for their commentaries, but also interested in “educating readers to read fiction better” (124). After all, “[f]iction commentaries were designed to help readers attain a level of control over the text that would enable them to have a lyric vision of what the author was trying to say in the work as a whole” (129). Even though none of the fiction commentators could claim that they completely elucidated all the mysteries of the texts, they still tend to identify with the author and guide the readers to interpret the characters. Chinese scholar Tan Fan 譚帆 believes that, from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, “transformed” (*bianti* 變體) fiction commentaries emerged in China. The characteristics of these “transformed” fiction commentaries include: 1) they often appeared in newly emerged publications, 2) they were published together with

serialized fictions, 3) they focused on “new fictions,” and 4) they particularly emphasized the political reform or revolutionary thoughts of the fictions they commented.

Therefore, Tan Fan argues, fiction commentaries, in a large part, also acted as a tool to call for society reform and awaken the people (37). The commentaries for *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* are not only in line with these features, but also work as a functional vehicle to promote social reform and enlighten the implied readers through character-centered criticism.

One example of such comments in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* is the critique of the character Liang Cuidai. Cuidai is a singing girl who often expresses her deep worries and sadness over the national crisis in her songs, but her friends always laugh at her for her silly ideas. One day, to kill time, she randomly picks two books: one is the *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, and the other is a French book, the *Biography of Joan of Arc*. Getting rid of the first one, Cuidai is attracted by the story of “the woman who saved the nation” (*jiuguo nüzi* 救國女子), and she is also deeply moved by the martyrdom exemplified by Joan of Arc. Later, in her dream, when Cuidai questions whether women can save the country and how can that happen, Joan of Arc appears in front of her. Joan of Arc tells her that *yin* and *yang* has alternated, and fortune comes to women. It’s time for Cuidai to become a leader with forty-eight exceptional women and seventy-two female scholars, who will all devote themselves to “save the country.” In the commentary, Haitian Duxiaozi writes:

At first, she (Liang Cuidai) had no idea about the meaning of “saving the country” and what it was about, but now she realizes that the nation can be saved! She did not know that women could save the country, but now she

realizes that women have this capability! She did not know that every single woman can save the country, but now she realizes that every single woman can save the country! She also did not know how to start to save the country, until she has her ideas straightened out after she is enlightened. ... Cuidai raises four questions. These questions not only bother Cuidai, but also bother me. Not only bother me, but also bother people of the world. (532-3; ch. 16)

Taking Cuidai as an example, this commentary highlights the transformation of an ordinary woman, from knowing nothing to realizing women's power and capability, in pursuit of "saving the nation." Like other ordinary people, at the beginning, she is simply anxious about the terrible situation of the nation. When she is enlightened by the story of Joan of Arc, Cuidai becomes more active and eager to know how to begin and where to start the fight for saving the nation. The commentator, Wohu Langshi, reminds the readers to compare their experiences with what happens to Cuidai, because the four questions raised by Cuidai, in his opinion, are the ones that "bother people of the world." It is time for the readers to acknowledge women's power and capability and think about how to act in order to save the country like Cuidai. In this manner, Wohu Langshi directs the feelings of the implied readers toward a new virtue—patriotism.

The setting of forty-eight "exceptional women" and seventy-two "female scholars," in a sense, is more like the one hundred and eight warriors in *The Water Margin*. Unlike *The Water Margin* that lists the heroes and warriors at the beginning, *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* only mentions this in Chapter Sixteen (the last chapter of this unfinished novel), without giving any information on the forty-eight "exceptional

women” and seventy-two “female scholars.” In Wohu Langshi’s commentary, he believes that it is because the author is “very patient in the process of literary creation” (*wenxi zhinai* 文心之耐) (535; ch. 16). Along with such patience, there also exists a kind of encouragement to let the readers fit in their ideal women warriors and scholars, either from those presented in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* or in their own imagination.

Even though the style of publishing a novel together with a commentary is different from the previous two kinds of hybridity I have discussed, one of the intentions of such collaboration¹⁹ is still related to the production of an agency for the readers to better interpret the women images in the novel. One of the purposes of hybridizing many stories of Chinese and foreign famous radical women is to offer examples of women’s transformation—from traditional Chinese female knights-errant to political revolutionaries with modern knowledge and skills. The hybridization of two genres—chivalric fiction and science fantasy—makes it possible. All these hybrid practices greatly contribute to the shaping of exceptional women in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*. The shaping of exceptional women in this novel, along with the important theme of patriotism, also involves the idea of liberating women through radical actions. In the following section, I would like to discuss the shaping of exceptional women by examining the ideal Kingdom of Women created by the author, Haitian Duxiaozi, especially how the issue of power over life and death influences the philosophies and behaviors of the protagonists.

¹⁹ There are a variety of reasons and functions of the fiction commentary. Moreover, publishing a novel with a commentary was really popular in late Qing. I do not deny the possibilities of other reasons for the publication of *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*.

The Kingdom of Women:

Women's Power, Modern Knowledge, and the Radical Action of Killing

In this novel, Haitian Duxiaozi creates a Kingdom of women. Within this Kingdom, instead of being excluded from “the single true and legislating principle from The Word, as well as from the (always patriarchal) face which accords to procreation its social value: excluded from knowledge and power” (Kristeva 21), the brave passionate lady, Jin Yaose, and her sisters—various exceptional women—challenge traditional positions of power and defend the honor and autonomy of women by creating their own laws and codes of conduct. They supplant men and become the authorized masters of the world and defend that position through their ability to kill. With naturally granted powers to kill and natural rights to dominance, Yaose and her radical sisters travel at ease from one place to another to maintain order and uphold justice to fulfill their duty to the country. In addition, to better achieve their goals, they begin to modernize their ways of living, acquire modern knowledge and wisdom, and endorse new technologies that progress the nation and further legitimize their control of it. The images of exceptional women in this novel directly contradict the typical critiques of Chinese women at that time. In the Kingdom of Women, women are not inferior to men; they cannot be confined to the family sphere and liabilities, and most of all, they are neither powerless nor helpless, neither ignorant nor backward. To better explore this Kingdom of Women, in this section, I will examine three aspects: how the construction of the Kingdom of Women is fraught with the issues of gender and the ambiguous question of “master” (*zhuren* 主人), how the radical action of killing is legitimized as a just method for defending women's rights and power, and how modern knowledge, technology, and skills

influence the shaping of exceptional women.

Women Supplant Men as the Masters

Haitian Duxiaozi explains his purpose for creating a Kingdom of Women in the preface. Echoing this intention, the first chapter starts with the story of a woman scholar named Qian Yifang 錢挹芳 who expresses her ideal nation that is ruled by women.

Having read the history of Cleopatra, the Egyptian Queen who ruled a nation through skillful diplomacy and tough nation management in ancient times, Yifang wrote a poem and an article, which were later published by *nüxue bao* 女學報.²⁰ In her poem, she compares heroines (*jinguo* 巾幗) with heroes (*yingxiong* 英雄). She praised women warriors (*niangzi jun* 娘子軍) because they fight enemies with great bravery, and they are more sincere and dedicated to their ideals. Yu Ji's 虞姬 tragic but heroic act of committing suicide in front of Xiang Yu 項羽, in Yifang's interpretation, is not only

²⁰ Although the publication of this article is fabricated, *Nüxue bao* 女學報 is a real women's journal at the turning of the twentieth century. According to Nanxiu Qian's study, there were actually two *Nüxue bao* 女學報 that were in an inheritance relationship. The one founded by Chen Xiefen's 陳顯芬 (1883–1923) in 1899 with the name of *Nübao* 女報 (Women's journal), which was changed into the name of *Nüxue bao* 女學報 (Journal of women's learning) in 1903, is generally regarded as "the first Chinese periodical for women." However, the periodical for women with the same title *Nüxue bao* (with the English title *Chinese Girl's Progress*) actually first appeared from late July to the end of October 1898 (twelve issues), during the 1898 Reforms period. Nanxiu Qian views the 1898 *Nüxue bao* as "the mother of Chen's 1902–03 *Nübao/Nüxue bao*." As Ellen Widmer commentates, *Nüxue bao* is well known for its forthright critiques "on the topic of women's inferior position in the past and the steps that need to be taken to restore the balance between women and men." But Nanxiu Qian reveals that the new generation of women reformers who contributed to Chen's *Nüxue bao* rejected "the more pluralist, confident, self-assured, and creative voices of the mother generation of women reformers" and gave way to "more patriarchal, value-abiding, and heroically vengeful daughters" because of the complicated interactions of gender, racial, and nationalistic issues.

because of her love for Xiang Yu, but also because of her grief for the loss of the Kingdom 拼將一死報國多. Yifang argues that history shows women—like Empress Lü²¹ and Empress Wu²²—can lead the country just like men. As she states, it’s time for women to grasp shining spears and to hit the war drum, and only blood can clean the national humiliation. In the article, she claims that women are “God’s favored ones” 上帝的驕子, and have “innate abilities and wisdoms” 天賦的能力 which can assemble all outstanding and exceptional heroines, so women would be better at changing the world. Yifang further contends, “From now on, I wish that women in China could have the power to be in charge of the country without the interference of a single man” (447-8; ch. 1)!

Both Qian Yifang’s poem and article emphasize women’s power and capability, and highlight the theme that “the women’s contribution to the nation’s well-being hinges on a resetting of their relationships to men” (Yeh 231). In the poem, traditional women warriors are glorified because they behave more heroically and determinedly than their male companions, and Yu Ji’s tragic suicide is reinterpreted as a devoted reaction to the loss of her country. As David Wang has argued, “[t]his tendency of equating the new image of female revolutionary with the old image of women warrior, while emblematic of a changing historical consciousness in favor of women’s rights, indicates no less a way of fantasizing about Chinese women at a time when Chinese men were experiencing

²¹ Empress Lü refers to Lü Zhi 呂雉 (241-180 BC). She was the empress consort of Emperor Gaozu 漢高祖 (256 or 247-195 BC), the founder and the first ruler of Han dynasty. She dominated the political scene after her husband died.

²² Empress Wu refers to Wu Zetian 武則天 (624-705) of Tang dynasty. She officially ruled the country during Zhou dynasty (684-705), and she was the only Empress regnant in Chinese history.

political impotence” (*Fin-de-Siecle Splendor* 168). The fantasy about Chinese women reflected in this novel is that women are going to, and should, take over the leadership of the country with “innate abilities and wisdoms” in the way that, as Wang has pointed out, men cannot. Moreover, as Wang also implies, the rejection of male government signifies a rejection of male domination. Overthrowing male government and taking control of the country is a more direct path to thwarting patriarchal domination. More importantly, in Qian Yifang’s perception, in order to “save the country” and get rid of “slave(s) of a subjugated country” (*wangguo nucai* 亡國奴才), women’s authority must be established.

At this very moment, when women become more visible as political subjects and discursive signifiers of a national future, the discourse of “women-as-slaves” (*nüzi wei nuli* 女子為奴隸) also became a concerned topos of enslavement in the late Qing.

Although there were various debates and complications around this issue, women were generally considered as slaves or even lower status. As Liang Qichao claimed, “[o]wing to women’s inability to support themselves and their dependence on other people, men raise women as livestock or slave” (Liang, “On Women’s Education” 191). However, *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* addresses this issue by subverting women’s status and power. In this novel, women are granted the superior and natural authority as the master (*zhuren* 主人) of the world. In the view of exceptional women, only corrupted officials and depraved men are the “slave(s) of a subjugated country.”

In addition, the Kingdom of Women, as a symbol and hope for a strong nation, puts ethnic antagonisms second to the gender conflicts. In the novel, upon the publication of Qian Yifang’s writings, people begin to respond actively almost everywhere in China. Facing the emergence of a growing number of women organizations, two male court

officials report their findings to Empress Dowager Hu 胡太后 and request the execution of all women revolutionaries. However, Empress Dowager Hu becomes incensed that they would call for the deaths of so many women. Furious about patriarchal orthodoxy critiques, such as “ignorance is a woman’s virtue,” and “how dare women interfere in national affairs,” Empress Dowager Hu rejects their request of putting down women’s organizations. Defending her gender, Empress Dowager Hu claims herself as a woman 咱們也是婦女. She fully believes that men are incapable of managing the country. In order to enhance her dominance, Empress Dowager Hu holds a religious ceremony. While positioned in the courtyard under a tablet that reads “who has the support of women has control” (*de’ci erba* 得雌而霸), she prays for the goddess to descend to the earth and to assist her to be the “mother of the world” (*shijie zhimu* 世界主母). Soon, from heaven falls a stone, on which the words “Stone of Goddess Nüwa” (*Nüwa shi* 女媧石) are inscribed. Empress Dowager Hu believes that the time has come for heroic women “to rise in response to the historical moment, to establish new authority, and to put the nation in order” (449-51; ch. 1).

It is obvious that the figure of Empress Dowager Hu was based on the Manchurian Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧. The naming of Hu 胡 reflects a sense of detestation and rejection. Since the Han dynasty, Han people usually called the ethnic group *xiongnu* 匈奴 as *huren* 胡人, which means “barbarian.” Later Han people regarded all non-Han as “*huren*.” In addition, the character *hu* 胡 in the expression “*hulai*” 胡來 means “to act arbitrarily regardless of the rules, to mess things up, and to cause troubles.” Despite the disfavor implied within the naming, Empress Dowager Hu is still portrayed

as defending women's rights. Instead of a racial issue, it is the gender issue that influences the depiction of Empress Dowager Hu. In Haitian Duxiaozi's portrayal, instead of emphasizing her ethnic background, he highlights Empress Dowager Hu's acknowledgment of her femininity.

Unlike revolutionaries and racialists, such as Zou Rong (1885-1905) and Chen Tianhua (1875-1905), who fully supported the anti-Qing movement and called for actions to free the Chinese nation from the Manchu-Regime and foreign imperialism, the author, Haitian Duxiaozi, and the commentator, Wohu Langshi, tended to separate the racial conflicts from colonization, and show sympathies to the female figure Empress Dowager Hu. As Wohu Langshi commented, "How can a woman fully control the whole country, distort facts, and confound right and wrong? Those who hold a candle to the devil should be condemned! Alas! It is understandable to make foreigners kill foreigners. However, it is outrageous to make countrymen kill fellow countrymen!" (451; ch. 1) In traditional power discourse, the sovereign is usually viewed as a meaningful, visible, and official representation of power. In *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, Empress Dowager Hu, however, represented a twisted phenomenon: a woman who happens to become the ruler of a patriarchal society, and even though she has no authentic power to change rules made by men, she has to take the blame for the failure and crisis originated in patriarchal domination. The sovereign represented by Empress Dowager Hu seems neither strong nor powerful. Although she is in the highest position of the nation, and she has the right to deny any official requests, she can still feel the instability of her dominant position, that's why she prays to heaven for the support from the goddess. Thus, Haitian Duxiaozi illustrates her as an important driving force behind the descending of the goddess—the

exceptional women and women scholars—who will “establish new authorities and put the nation in order.” With hope, Empress Dowager Hu wishes that she can become a true master—“the mother of the world.”

The idea of “The Kingdom of Women” (*nüer guo* 女兒國) has iterations in a number of literary works. I would like to use the version in the *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記) as a comparison with *The Stone of Goddess Niwa* to discuss how each work approaches gender issues and the theme of slave-master power relationships. *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記) is well known for its interesting story and fascinating plots. The feminine world in this novel is located in the country of Western Liang, and all the residents are female.²³ When the Queen knows that Tang Sanzang and his three disciples pass through her city on their way to the Western Heaven, she is very delighted. She explains to her civil officials:

Since primal chaos was first cleared we have never seen a man in our country under all the queens who have reigned here. The fortunate arrival of the Tang emperor’s younger brother must be a gift from Heaven. I have decided to use our country’s wealth to persuade the emperor’s brother to become king with me as his queen. Then we can unite the male and the female and produce sons and grandsons to pass the throne on to. (1777; ch. 54)

²³ In *Journal to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西遊記), the story about this Kingdom of Women is written in See Wu Cheng’en 吳承恩, Chapter 54, with the title “The Buddha-Nature Traveling West Enters Womanland; The Mind-Ape Makes a Plan to Escape from the Beauties.”

For women in this womanland, Tang Sanzang is “a man from a great country ruled by a heaven-sent dynasty,” and he is “a son of China in the Southern Jambu continent” (1779). They try whatever they can to make him stay. The eagerness for the emergence of a King is more like a longing for the dominance of men, or in Foucault’s expression, “love of the master.” As Foucault points out, this concept has its own problems due to “the insubstantiality of the notion of the master, an empty form haunted only by the various phantoms of the master and his slave” (“Power and Strategies” 139). Since “the master” is an unstable figure, the concept of power associated with “the master” and the forms of exercising power also become changeable. Besides the affirmative forms of power, such as making rules, the negative terms, like refusal and limitation, are also closely related to the procedures of power, as Foucault interprets, “Power is what says no” (“Power and Strategies” 139). In patriarchal social structures, men are generally considered as the masters who have the power to say no, as seen in this episode in *Journey to the West*. Even though the Queen has the power to reject the travel documents of Tang Sanzang and his disciples, without which they cannot continue their travel, it is Tang Sanzang who expresses the rejection by refusing to marry the Queen.

Compared with the women in *Journey to the West*, the exceptional women presented in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, exhibit an opposite attitude towards men. Instead of longing for male participation, these women criticize men’s incompetency and even reject the existence of men. They firmly believe that women are the masters and the saviors of the world. Such belief makes these women more ambitious in fighting for their own lives and subverting to the power relations. As this contrast reveals, *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* expresses a thorough recasting of women’s power and abilities in terms of

their national influences and public roles. Through addressing the tensions in gender relationships and resetting women's positions in power structures, the author further highlights women's contribution to the nation's well-being. In the novel, along with the resistance of male authority at a national level, there are several women's organizations that exert influence on a comparatively local level, and women in these organizations are more radical and violent.

Killing in the Name of Saving the Country and Defending Women's Rights

In *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, the author delineated quite a few women's organizations. Women of these organizations exist in their own sphere²⁴ much like the *xia* people. As Petrus Liu argues, the *xia* people in the martial arts literatures present certain interventions on the representation of the existing political authority, and because the invention of *xia* presents human subjects as stateless subjects who are guided by ethical norms instead of being confined by the laws of the state, they create their own sphere. The discourse of *jianghu* 江湖 (river and lake) defines a public sphere disconnected from the sovereign nation-state. This sphere is related to the idea of *minjian* 民间 (folk world) and opposed to the concept of *tianxia* 天下 (under the heaven). Like *xia* people, the diverse exceptional women in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* also actively exist in the "river and lake." Without any information of their families or hometowns, these women live in a sphere outside of any political or social structure. In this sphere, they totally neglect the

²⁴ Here, I use the term "sphere" instead of "Kingdom" in order to differentiate the different levels of power. The "Kingdom" more relates to the national level, whereas the "sphere," comparatively speaking, refers to local and regional level. However, in terms of the issue of women's power/rights versus patriarchal power/system/order, the women's sphere does not contradict the Women's Kingdom.

patriarchal laws of the country, establish their own norms and rules, and legitimize their own beliefs. Particularly, in the name of saving the country and defending women's rights, the radical action of killing is actually justified as a meaningful and valuable technique. Among all the women's organizations presented in the novel, Floral Blood Party (*Huaxue dang* 花血黨) is the largest and the most influential one. I will focus on this organization and explore how the determination of "killing" is reflected by their regulations, their views on the relationship between patriotism/revolution and family/marriage/sexual desires, and their radical practices.

Floral Blood Party is a large and well-organized women group that specialized in assassination. This party has dozens of branches around China with more than a million members. Most of these passionate members are ambitious and violent women who are engaged in assassinations with the belief that this activity can improve the world for women. Women of this party are fearless and violent, and bloodshed makes them more excited and brave. Under the leadership of Qin Ainong, most often addressed as Madame Qin, they are determined to subvert the patriarchal structure and orthodoxy. Women who wish to join this organization need to devote "to guard three kinds of authorities (*zun sanshou* 遵三守). It refers to:

First, all kinds of power in the world, obvious or hidden, are controlled by women. It is our women's duty to protect this natural power. Second, all men in the world are dependants on women, and women are the master. It is our women's duty to guard this natural master identity. Third, women are illuminati of the civilization. All cultures are initiated from women. It is our women's duty to maintain this natural pioneer identity. (478-9; ch. 7)

Women of Floral Blood Party assert their rights through those authorities. These beliefs not only grant women the title of “master” but also claim that women naturally possess the power of control. As the result of turning over the power position, men become subordinate, and the rules pronounced by men also need to be destroyed. Women, instead of men, become the center of the world. With this power, women become the authority who establish the regulations of this organization, which they hope to be applied to all womanhood. In order to save the country/kingdom and defend women’s rights, the members of Floral Blood Party also aim “to eliminate four types of traitors/lust” (*mie sizei* 滅四賊): “internal traitors” (*neizei* 內賊), “external traitors” (*waizei* 外賊), “superior level traitors” (*shangzei* 上賊), and “inferior lust” (*xiazei* 下賊). Madame Qin explains to Jin Yaose:

Family is evaluated as the most important aspect in our traditional ethics. But women are deprived of freedom due to the “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues.” Therefore, women need to reject love affairs between men and women, including cutting off their marriage or male-female romance. This is to eliminate “internal traitors.” The term *wai* 外 (out) refers to the global concept of race. Our party is determined to stop being subservient. What we evaluate most is self-respect and independence, and we hate those who fawn over foreign powers. So we need to eliminate “external traitors.” The third type, *shang* 上 (up) refers to social positions. In our country, the Emperor is regarded as the father of the country, even if he is despotic and tyrannical. What we abominate most are the oppressors and traitors who are obedient to the tyrant as loyal

slaves and faithful servants. Those oppressors and traitors—“superior level traitors”—are our sworn enemies. Once we encounter them, there must be a battle to the death. The fourth type, *xia* 下 (down) refers to the lower half of the human body. It means the sexual organs. They can cause problems for people caught by personal romance or sexual desires, which will harm our bodies and lower our enthusiasm to devote to the country. Therefore, members of our party need to eliminate “inferior lust,” take a vow of celibacy, and never touch filthy male organs. (477-8; ch. 7)

In pursuit of the “women’s transformation” 婦女之變革, the author manipulated the idea of liberating women through revolution. Instead of being weak and powerless like they are generally perceived, women in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* are violent and dominating. Like knights-errant, they value loyalty, gallantry, and justice, but the value system and justice that they fight for are totally different from patriarchal traditions. Rather, it is a subverted power system established by women, for women, and featured with feminist consciousness. By transforming chivalric women into revolutionaries, the author “gave rise to one of the most important themes in modern Chinese fiction, the making of a revolutionary/reactionary woman” (D. D. Wang, *Fin-de-siècle splendor* 170). In addition, the author also recasted the old dilemma of heroism versus romance, which is represented in this novel as patriotism and feminist radical revolution versus family, love, and sexual desire.

From “to guard three kinds of authorities” to the “to eliminate four types of traitors/lust,” these “intentionally shocking and grotesque descriptions” are meant to implant women “with the vigor and fighting spirit needed to free themselves of the

depriving political, psychological, social, and sexual framework of the Confucius order” (Yeh, 247). While the rule of “guarding the three kinds of authorities” expresses women’s ambition to subvert the power positions, the regulation of “eliminating the four types of traitors/lust” conveys the rejection of restrictive family boundaries, emotional love, and sexual desire in an extreme degree. In terms of marriage and love, exceptional women suppress their personal emotions and desires in order to show patriotism. To achieve concentration on national salvation with women’s power, members of Floral Blood Party are required to be celibate. Romantic love, natural instinct, and erotic demand, even family life, are all treated as obstacles that block their ability to defend women’s rights and save the country. Such depiction, to a certain degree, reflects one type of social ideology that popularly circulated at late Qing. With the influence of revolutionary radicalism, sacrificing oneself for a just cause is highly promoted as a noble way of expressing patriotism. Therefore, the more personal interests that women give away, such as emotional attachment, life demand, even life itself, the more glorious the women become because of their morality in sacrificing themselves for saving the country. In the name of salvation, they are supposed to sacrifice everything and take whatever means necessary to achieve their aims.

Besides the concerns on the issue of marriage and love, the author also calls attention to the question of motherhood in terms of the tension between the sexes. Within Floral Blood Party, whether to have children or not depends on each woman’s own will. If they want to deliver babies, instead of direct interaction with men, women conceive through artificial insemination—“just remove men’s sperm and plant them into women’s bodies” (478; ch. 7). Such an action is not only a denial of patriarchal power over the

right of birth, but also a protest of the logic of “production (class) and reproduction (family)” (Kristeva, 23). As Kristeva argues, in a patriarchal mechanism, women are associated with “the symbolic order—the order of verbal communication, the paternal order of descent” only if they maintain their virginity (34). As a result, motherhood is perceived as a conspicuous sign of *jouissance* of the female (maternal) body, a pleasure that must at all costs be repressed: the function of procreation must be kept strictly subordinated to the rule of the Father’s Name. In a patriarchal society, men are thought to have the power over everything, including the lives of his wives and his offspring. As active dominators, men are believed to be able to control the process of producing their descendants. On the one hand, men indulge in sexual gratification. On the other hand, they treat women as “nothing more than instruments that make and nurture human seeds” (He-Yin, “On the Question of Women’s Liberation” 54). Consequently, women tend to be defined simply by their physical capacity for motherhood and reproduction, which is regarded as the main responsibility of women for the family and society. The only way available for women to reestablish their identities with the maternal body is through becoming mothers themselves, which will allow them to be identified with the paternal order.

In *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, however, women totally destroy that patriarchal mechanism by eradicating “the paternal order of descent.” Childbearing, instead of being the procreation in the name of the Father, becomes a free choice of women. Not only the reason for pregnancy, but also when and how they get pregnant, are both under the control of women. More importantly, the authoritative Father figure is dramatically replaced by a biological symbol—a sperm. By “killing” the Father, the motherhood is

then liberated from the attachment to the paternal order and the burden of reproduction. The pleasure of the female (maternal) body, if there is any, is not femininity and maternity itself; rather, it lies in the manipulation of the identity and role of paternity.

If the killing of Father figure is a “mild” denial of patriarchal order, the radical actions of killing men physically is a direct rebellion. In the novel, contrary to patriotic women, men generally appear either as negative figures who should be removed or eliminated due to their obstruction to the revolution, or as transient tools utilized by women for the achievement of revolutionary goals. Since men are often identified as “oppressors and traitors” (*minzei dufu* 民賊獨夫), “slaves and servants” (*sinu zhonggui* 死奴忠鬼) to tyranny, women declare a war to the death on men in the name of defending women’s rights and saving the country, and “killing” is justified as a necessary practice.

The place where the headquarters of Floral Blood Party is located is called Heavenly Fragrant Courtyard (*Tianxiang Yuan* 天香院). Just like the fragrant yet poisonous flowers planted in their courtyard, women of this party allow themselves to be admired by the corrupted officials in order to get close to them. To successfully assassinate these corrupted officials, some Floral Blood Party members chose to marry them as concubines and kill them on their wedding nights. The technique of utilizing the attraction of femininity and the female body as a vehicle to approach men, even a weapon to destroy men, is not exclusively used only in Floral Blood Party. Another women’s organization called “Lusty Harmony Party” (*Chunrong dang* 春融黨) is the one that maximizes the manipulation of female attraction when they are dealing with men. Located in an open erotic place, under the leadership of Cui Xuezhuan 崔雪膊 whose

nickname is “Carefree Queen” (*zizai nǚzu* 自在女尊), Lusty Harmony Party has no restrictions on drinking habits or sexual behaviors. Whereas members of Floral Blood Party are forbidden to be involved in any emotional or sexual relations with men, except when they use marriage as the means to kill corrupted men, members of Lusty Harmony Party use the female body as the most meaningful tool. They are good at “educating” men by giving speeches when they are indulging in sensual pleasures. The ultimate goals of Floral Blood Party and Lusty Harmony Party are the same, that is, to overcome the foreign devils, eliminate male traitors, and save the country. However, the former are incredibly celibate and sober women who only engage in marriage as precursor to assassination, whereas the latter are extremely libertine women who achieve their goals in bed. Although the author did not elaborate the relationships of the two women’s organizations, from the friendship of the two leaders, Madame Qin and Ms. Cui, it is highly possible that they work together closely. If members of Lusty Harmony Party fail to “kill” corrupted and evil men mentally, women of Floral Blood Party will kill them physically.

No matter what kind of “killing” these women practice, they all need to sacrifice. For members of Lusty Harmony Party, they sacrifice their chastity, and for Floral Blood Party, the price is their lives. In Chapter Five, when the news comes that nearly four hundred officials and two princes are killed at almost the same time, all the Floral Blood Party members become very excited and celebrate their victory. But as a price for such radical actions, more than forty of these women are caught or killed. The loss of chastity and the radical action of killing are either extreme or violent, and contradict traditional norms. However, the author highly lauds them because they act out of “the love for their

race and the country” 愛種族愛國家, and appraises them as exceptional women who “sacrifice for saving the country,” and “take revenge for the people” fearlessly and dauntlessly. With the determination of eliminating male traitors, these women become national heroines, and their actions are justified as right responses in the name of a higher cause. Their bravery and passion for saving the country gains the praise and recognition of all the women in the country. Such illustration presents an exceptional image of a woman who gains her political identity, surpassing the identity of a prostitute or an assassin, for sacrificing herself for the integrity of the country and the people. The image of a woman who disgraces herself for national salvation not only mollifies the tension and contradiction between the morality of chastity, violence and the discussion of patriotism, but also becomes a unique form for the interdependence and mutual support of these two discourses in late Qing novels.

In *The Stone of Goddess Niüwa*, the author created a special sphere for radical and revolutionary women, so that they can intervene in the existing patriarchal political order with their own doctrines. Within this sphere, women believe that “women are superior to men” and “women can manipulate men.” This justification comes from a desire for quickly changing the current national living situation. It also implies an exaggerated publicity and empowerment of national heroines. Although the actions promoted by the author may not mean a true melioration and improvement of women’s status, the author conveyed a yearning for neutralizing sexual differences, by placing men and women into the opposite sides of intense confrontation and making men in the disadvantaged situation,. It also reveals that women who become strong and powerful are very important for developing women’s integrity and independence. Of course, the setting that “women

are superior to men” is not the focus of the author. In fact, the purpose of derogating men is to discursively reflect the new women, their thoughts, and emotions. By redefining the moral norms and orders between men and women, the author tended to present the changes in a transforming era and called women to follow the trend and learn from these exceptional women. Particularly, by shaping exceptional women who were better at applying modern knowledge and technology into their practices, the author envisaged a more stronger powerful and womanhood.

Enhancing Women’s Capability of Controlling and Killing
with Modern Knowledge and Technology

As I have discussed in the previous section, the Women’s Kingdom in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* features modern knowledge and technological savvy. The application of modern concepts and ideas not only helps to bring the exceptional women into a modern context, but also assists them in achieving their goals of controlling and manipulating, particularly in more effective ways.

The mightiness of exceptional women in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* is multi-leveled. Conventional norms and ideals of men’s power and strength, in a sense, are based on men’s physical capabilities, and women are judged as inferior due women’s physical bodies. Women in this novel—for example, members of the Floral Blood Party—however, are healthy, strong, and vigorous because of all kinds of inventions like the “liquid essence of food.” Along with physical improvement, weapons adopted by women are also changed and upgraded. Modern equipment, such as guns, explosives, and futuristic machines, replace swords as the “companion” of exceptional women. The

transformation of modern equipment not only allows exceptional women to do whatever they want, but also differentiates them from men in the sense of rebellion instead of simple inheritance.

In Qiu Jin's poem "Song of the Barbarian Sword," it illustrates, "When [the] sword is drawn from its sheath, then heaven shakes; [a]nd sun and moon, stars and planets quickly obscure their light." As it implies, swords generally connote a sense of strength and power. Many scholars have recognized the significant meanings represented by swords. Foucault, for example, claims,

The sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing; he evidenced his power over life only through the death he was capable of requiring. The right which was formulated as the "power of life and death" was in reality the right to *take* life or to *let* live. Its symbol, after all, was the sword. ("Right of Death and Power Over Life" 136)

Although Foucault emphasizes the power over life and death associated with the sword, he limits such power only to "The sword"—the one held by the sovereign as the trope of absolute authority, because the dominant power is usually believed to be processed only by the sovereign. In history and literary representations, *xia* people are also good at using swords. They are more than capable of using swords to kill their targets. However, swords in the hands of a *xia* function as a kind of special weapon either to the sovereign power or to subvert such absolute power because of *xia*'s own capability to take life or to let live. As Chen Pingyuan has pointed out, "pursuing righteousness with their swords" (*zhangjian xingxia* 仗劍行俠) is one of the basic characteristics of *xia* in

literary representation.²⁵ The sword (*jian* 劍) becomes a very important accompaniment of *xia* people, and it serves as both a weapon and a token of power over life and death. In the novel *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, however, Jin Yaose and her sisters demonstrate that power in their own manner and methods. Instead of the “sword” (*jian* 劍) —the symbol of the “power of life and death,” they adopt powerful modern equipment and skills.

In Chapter Eleven, the author depicted a gun shooting competition between Jin Yaose and Tang Qiongqian, the younger sister of the leader of a women’s organization named “White Cross Community” (*Bai shizi she* 白十字社). All the members of this organization are very excited about it. As they comment:

The tradition of Chinese womanhood does not allow women to practice military skills, which is one of the reasons why women are weak and fragile. It is also the reason why our country is invaded and bullied by others. The gun competition is going to show the improvement of women’s skills. It also indicates a promising future for our country. (502-3)

Gun shooting is generally regarded as a male activity. Like swords, guns are also associated with a kind of power and strength. In this novel, guns take on a more significant symbolic meaning because, comparatively speaking, guns also symbolize a

²⁵ In his book *qigu wenren xiake meng* 千古文人俠客夢, with details and examples from literary works, Chen Pingyuan points out four basic characteristics of *xia* in literary representation, namely, “pursuing righteousness with their swords” (*zhangjian xingxia* 仗劍行俠), “paying a debt of gratitude with pleasure and seeking vengeance without hesitation” (*kuaiyi enchou* 快意恩仇), “living a carefree life in a mundane world of strife” (*xiao’ao jianghu* 笑傲江湖), and “wandering all over the world with free wills” (*liangji tianya* 浪跡天涯).

kind of resistance. The sovereign, or the master, generally holds the Sword to demonstrate his power and to control or destroy the rights of others. However, the ones who refuse to take orders and want to overthrow this domination can use their guns to rebel and to show their defiance towards the authority through their capabilities, just like Su Feiya and Jin Yaose. By equipping these radical women with guns rather than swords, the author also makes women superior to traditional knights-errant. Because, instead of holding the controversial power symbol (swords), these women choose to adopt more powerful and lethal weapons. They are not blind followers of traditional knights-errant; rather, they are soldiers and rebels in a turbulent period of history.

Guns and explosives are not the only weapons used by radical women to subvert existing power structures in the novel. Compared to the women of Floral Blood Party, members of White Cross Community are less violent and rely more on the application of modern machines. As the name of this organization implies, it involves medical practices just like the Red Cross Organization. Contrasted with the color red, which is generally associated with violence and blood, the color white is more pure and ideal. One of the specialties of this organization is to help people conquer their addictions, especially to “remove evil thoughts” by using a brain washing machine operated by a female scientist named Chu Xiangyun 楚湘雲. The brain washing machine works as a powerful weapon for women to control people’s minds, especially the minds of corrupted men. In the brain washing hospital (*xi’nao yuan* 洗腦院), Xiangyun, opens people’s head, and use different chemicals to wash different brains. She bleaches the ones obsessed with rank and wealth, filters the ones occupied by desires of sexuality and money, and stabilizes the ones who lack clear thoughts or purposes. For those too rotten to be recovered, she will replace

them with the brains of oxen (495-8; ch. 10). It seems that as long as Xiangyun wishes, she can deal with any kind of man, and she can control any kind of mind.

For the purpose of “saving the country and the people,” Xiangyun establishes a brain washing hospital and determines to wash people’s brains in order to “restore order, get rid of ignorance and backwardness.” Jin Yaose’s brain is “spotlessly white,” which shows she is an exceptional woman who loves the country and the people, therefore, she could take revenge for them. The metaphor of the brain washing machine reflects the boom of the enlightenment movement at the early twentieth century, for enlightenment generally starts with the changing of people’s “brains” (*nao* 腦). In his article, “The Public Brain of the Exceptional People” (*Haojie zhi gongnao* 豪傑之公腦), Liang Qichao claims that heroes and outstanding figures are the “public brain” (*gongnao* 公腦) of the citizens. Just like if a nation was a person, then “the brain” is responsible for the development and progression. Liang writes:

French people talk about freedom and equality. Italian people talk about independence. Japanese people talk about respecting the Mikado and resisting foreign invasion. Exceptional people of a nation, although they are different in social status, personality, and experiences, are all emerging in a disturbed era. They happen to have the same views and get together without recruitment. With the same purpose, they become the public brain of the exceptional people. If all the exceptional people have a public brain, then dozens, even hundreds of people will function like one person. Moreover, the public brain of exceptional people is also the public brain of the citizens. If all citizens have a public brain, then thousands, even

millions of people will become one person, and nothing in the world cannot be achieved. (512)

The public brain of exceptional people was proposed as a solution to “everything in the world” (*tianxia shi* 天下事). The emphasis of foresight, sagacity, great ideals, and ambition endows the imagination of “exceptional people” with the feature of modernity. The definition of “public brain” implies a view of unity and integrity of the world. Although the desire for the existence of a “public brain” is full of dramatic exaggeration, in a certain sense, it highlights that shaping people’s brains/minds is so important and necessary for the transformation of national character. At the turning point from tradition to modernity, the promotion of “public brain” is treated as the prerequisite of enlightenment, which reflects the appeal of constructing an ideal society. It also demonstrates that everyone can share the idealism with heroes, which implies a new ideal personality, that is, all spiritual notions and concepts can be transformed from being private to being public; in other words, the benefits of the public/ the people are above all. It is also very important to change and transform “private brains.” Based on the principle of benefiting the public, the “public brain” develops private kindness into the actions of an individual in public lives, which makes exceptional people have the quality of being able to “save the world.”

The public brain conveys the utopian ideal that some exceptional people can still change the world. The adoption of the brain washing machine in *The Stone of Goddess Niiwa* expresses exceptional women’s attempt to make this ideal possible in a dramatic way. Despite that it is fantastic and exaggerated, the utilization of modern knowledge and techniques makes the women in this novel exceptional. It also, like planting a seed of

hope for its readers, soundly reiterates the idea that women do have the power and can change the country.

Conclusion

Although traditional Confucian orthodoxy favors tame and elegant women, at the turning of twentieth century in China, some images of exceptional women, like Jin Yaose and the other women in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa*, are featured with violence and strength. As one of the popular cultural tropes at that time, this new heroic womanhood joins the discourse of modernity with consideration of gender and nationalism, yet, in a slightly different way than the martyr Hui Xing I discussed in previous chapter. Rather than Hui Xing who was a historical figure still bound by the social norms and obligations, in literary representation, Jin Yaose and her radical women sisters become their own masters with the ability to kill, to destroy, and to take over. They are also granted the power to control life and death, and they act as saviors for both the nation and themselves. Nonetheless, like Hui Xing, even though these women kill others in the name of salvation, they are also ready to die for salvation.

Such an illustration is neither a pure product of fictionalization nor a simple figment of imagination. The radical and violent women images are the consequence of integrating traditional and modern Chinese female knights-errant and foreign exceptional women. With the platform provided by the genre of reformed novel, these women's international *xia* spirit, which highly values valor and violence, is circulated and developed. What makes the exceptional women in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* distinguished is also represented by their philosophies about the relationship and the

tensions between men and women, as well as the modern weapons and technologies they possess. All of these make the exceptional women more powerful, violent, and fearless. In the name of salvation, they are granted the power of killing and manipulation, and they behave violently and extremely.

However, within the question of life and death for the women question and salvation, “killing” is only a kind of method; the ultimate goal for exceptional women is “to save” and “to live.” Hui Xing’s killing of self was out of the wish for the “long life” of her women’s school and women’s education, whereas Jin Yaose and her sisters’ killing of other conveys the hope that their actions would lead women towards better and modern lives. Yet, while people glorify these exceptional women’s images in the national discourse, they tend to overlook women’s problems that existed within women’s own sphere and associated with women’s daily life. Therefore, in next chapter, I will move to the theme of women’s salvation by examining a novel written by a woman author and about women’s daily life.

CHAPTER THREE

CHIVALRIC BEAUTIES: WRITING ABOUT WOMEN'S DAILY LIFE AND THE YEARNING FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION

In the previous two chapters, I discuss two types of exceptional women. Each type desires female emancipation and has her methods complicated by or entangled in the discourse of national salvation. Both types of exceptional women display powers over life and death through the act of killing, either killing the self or others, in reality or in literary imagination. In the case of Hui Xing, her power was through the political message and manner of her suicide. Hui Xing's great hope was that well-educated women would have better opportunities for living a fulfilling life. For Jin Yaose and many other heroines of *The Stone of Goddess Niwa*, power came from using violence and subversion to eliminate the influence of corrupted male politicians, patriarchs, and traitors to the ideals of the Kingdom of Women. For the women's groups in this novel, their hope was that political, martial, and scientific revolution would provide greater opportunities for women to enjoy better lives. In these above-mentioned examples, along with these women's radical actions of taking life, their desire "to live" is very strong. They sacrificed themselves not only for the purpose of creating a strong nation, but also with the belief that liberating women from subservience would aid them in leading better and modern lives.

To follow up the topic of salvation, in this chapter, I will move the analysis of exceptional women to those focused more on women's liberation through an examination of the novel *Chivalric Beauties* (*Xiayi Jiaren* 俠義佳人) written by a female author Shao Zhenhuan 邵振華 (1882-?). Shao has been regarded as a talented woman from Jixi 績溪.¹ Her father was Shao Baoqing 邵班卿 (1851-1898), who wrote the very influential work, *Alarmist Talk by Shao* (*Shaoshi weiyuan* 邵氏危言) (1887). Despite very limited materials, many scholars have recognized Shao Zhenhua as a very important woman writer. In 1929, Hu Shi 胡適 wrote a preface for *A Brief Study on Elite Women's Writings in Qing Dynasty* (*Qing guixiü yiwen lüe xu* 《清閨秀藝文略》序). In this article, Hu Shi praised *Chivalric Beauties* as one of the excellent works written by talented elite women writers in the past three hundred years.² Modern Chinese scholar, Guo Yanli 郭延裡, regards her as a member of “the truly emerged female novelists in the twentieth century Chinese literature history.”³ The novel, *Chivalric Beauties*, represents Shao's talents and enlightened thoughts.

The exceptional women of this novel are notably different in that they pay more attention to women's affairs. The entirety of their actions is oriented towards saving women and helping them live better lives. Unlike women presented in *The Stone of Goddess Nüwa* who care more about establishing women's authority of the world through

¹ Jixi 績溪 is a city in Anhui 安徽 province. It was the birth place of Shao Zhenhua.

² See Hu Shih 胡適 “Sanbainian zhong de nüzuojia: qing guixiu yiwen lüe yu” 三百年中的女作家——《清閨秀藝文略》序 (Women Writers in Three Hundred of Years—Preface for ‘A Brief Study on Elite Women's Writings in Qing Dynasty’).

³ See Guo Yanli, “Ershi shiji chuye nüxing wenxue zuopin de zhuanxing jiqi wenxueshi yiyi 二十世紀初葉女性文學作品的轉型及其文學史意義” (The Transformation of Chinese Women's Literature in the First 20 Years of the Twentieth Century and the Significance of Its History).

radical actions, the protagonists in *Chivalric Beauties* closely focus on the events and conditions of women's daily lives, especially their family status and economic situation. The exceptional women in *Chivalric Beauties* believe that the power to save women belongs to, and should be controlled, by women themselves. In contrast to the radical women in *The Stone of Goddess Niiwa*, who pursue their goals through radical political means and violent actions, women in *Chivalric Beauties* propose that a new ideal womanhood should be achieved through fighting for a harmonious familial atmosphere and a respectable social life. The portrait of exceptional women—the ideal womanhood—in this novel conveys women's desire to save themselves by seeking a better life in more moderate and pragmatic ways.

Chivalric Beauties is an unfinished novel containing forty chapters. The first volume contained twenty chapters and was published by the Commercial Press 商務印書館 in April of 1909. About two years later, in July of 1911, the Commercial Press published the subsequent twenty chapters. However, no further volumes have been found so far or published.⁴ *Chivalric Beauties* illustrates a group of elite women who establish a Shanghai-based feminist organization named “Society of Brightness” (*Xiaoguang hui* 曙光會). This organization is founded and chaired by Meng Dimin 孟迪民, a brilliant and well-educated young lady from a wealthy family. The character *di* 迪 means “enlightenment” in the phrase *qidi* 啟迪, and *min* 民 means people. As her name implies, Meng establishes this organization with the aim to bring enlightenment to

⁴ At the end of Chapter Forty, it says, “If you want to know what happens next, please read the next volume.” This indicates that the author Shao Zhenhua did have plans and thoughts for another twenty chapters. It is also possible that no further volumes were published by the Commercial Press.

rural people, especially women, and to save them from the “darkness.” The focus of this organization is to take care of women’s affairs and problems. With ample funds and rich resources, the well-organized Society of Brightness is an ideal agency for saving women. Alongside Meng Dimin, Gao Jianchen 高健塵 and Xiao Zhifen 蕭芷芬, both serve as advisors. The three women are the soul of the Society of Brightness. To help women be released from family burdens and liberate their minds, Dimin and her friends set up women’s factories and women’s technical schools to teach women practical skills and guide them toward modern lives.

In the process of promoting women’s education and practical training, members of the Society of Brightness encounter many difficulties. In most occasions, they have to help women solve family problems first. These problems are generally related to the relationships among wives and concubines, and between wives and mothers-in-law. The problems also concern traditional customs and rules of marriage and women’s family duties. Thus, the mission of Society of Brightness also includes saving women from family violence and injustice, both physically and mentally. While each protagonist has a different outlook and approach when she confronts women’s problems, the three work in a way that is complementary to each other in their pursuit of women’s liberation. By illustrating multi-faced solutions, the author Shao Zhenhua presents the notion that the ideal womanhood is characterized with diversity.

A Tour of Women’s World in a Semi-verisimilitude Fiction

At the time of its publishing, *Chivalric Beauties* was labeled as “new fiction” (*xin xiaoshuo* 新小說). To categorize fictions with certain labels when they were published

was a general practice in the late Qing. Take the journal, “Fiction Forest” (*xiaoshuo lin* 小說林), for example. There were about a dozen labels, such as “social fiction” (*shehui xiaoshuo* 社會小說), “historical fiction” (*lishi xiaoshuo* 歷史小說), “domestic fiction” (*jiatong xiaoshuo* 家庭小說), “diplomatic fiction” (*waijiao xiaoshuo* 外交小說), “political fiction” (*zhengzhi xiaoshuo* 政治小說), and “scientific fiction” (*kexue xiaoshuo* 科學小說).⁵ These labels, as Michael Hill argues, “point to a restless movement within the circuits of writing, translation, adaption, and reading to expand the scope of literary representation beyond the boundaries of late imperial vernacular fiction” (98-9). *Chivalric Beauties* was not limited to any specific category, but the label “new fiction” confirmed its active participation in echoing “the Revolution in the Circle of Novel” (*xiaoshuojie geming* 小說界革命).

Since Liang Qichao initiated “the Revolution in the Circle of Novel,” intellectuals began to regard writing “new fictions” as a useful method for enlightenment or education. Novels featured with the purpose of revealing the darkness—exposé novel, or in Lu Xun’s words, “novels of denunciation” 譴責小說—represented one of the literary trends of that particular era. In terms of the skepticism on the social mission of the type of novel, Michael Hill has conducted a thorough analysis in his book *Lin Shu, INC*. Hill proposes to examine the disagreement on the role of a novel in social reform movements and its aesthetic value by “thinking about verisimilitude in literary representation,” especially the application of “purposeful verisimilitude” (99-101). To follow this concept,

⁵ There were also “detective fiction” (*zhentan xiaoshuo* 偵探小說), “military fiction” (*junshi xiaoshuo* 軍事小說), “sentimental fiction” (*xieqing xiaoshuo* 寫情小說), “strange romantic fiction” (*qiqing xiaoshuo* 奇情小說), “burlesque fiction” (*huaqi xiaoshuo* 滑稽小說), and “allegory fiction” (*yuyan xiaoshuo* 預言小說).

Chivalric Beauties is a novel of purposeful semi-verisimilitude, because besides representing “what middle-class readers took to be ordinary—ordinary persons, such as servant girls,”⁶ *Chivalric Beauties* also represented what were viewed, at least in the illustration of the author, as extraordinary and exceptional.

In the preface, Shao discussed why she chose to write a novel. There was always a gap between the ideal and the reality. When facing the imbalance between ideal and reality, the more influenced by the thoughts concerning equality of men and women and equal rights between husband and wife, the greater the feeling of injustice Shao had. Shao wanted to “speak out against the unfair treatment,” but she also realized that she was unable to attract enough attention in scholarly writings 不能著書立論. Therefore, she expected that her novel could be utilized as a method to communicate with women. Adapting what she had seen and heard with her own thoughts and ideas into the writing of a novel, in *Chivalric Beauties*, Shao pictured the lives of women at that time, both in the middle and lower class. By manipulating the stories in certain localities and conditions, she deliberately exposed the darkness of the women’s sphere. Shao’s writing of *Chivalric Beauties* was purposeful, she wanted to show readers, especially women readers, “what part of the real world deserved their attention and demanded action” (Hill, 100). Shao attempted to call the attention of women towards the problematic situations of women both in family life and in the public environment. With expectations that women audiences could be woken up to the seriousness of their situations, Shao hoped that women could be motivated to struggle for modern life and self-improvement when they realized the darkness and violence that existed in the women’s sphere

⁶ Claybaugh, *Novel of Purpose*, p. 36, quoted by Hill, p. 100.

吾女子睹黑暗而思文明, 觀強暴而思自振 (85-6). But along with the backward practices, ignorant situations, and unfair treatments, Shao also transformed all of her expectations and dreams into the shaping of exceptional women in the novel. Beholding great expectations and hopes for women's better lives, Shao presented her unrealized dream in the writing of the novel *Chivalric Beauties*. Therefore, some of the women characters illustrated in the novel had a Utopian element. Different from "ordinary people," they could always find suitable solutions and methods, even though they beheld different attitudes towards women's problems. In addition, they were exceptional because their views reflected the modern concepts of that time, such as *nüquan* 女權—which can be translated as "women's rights" in the expression *quanli* 權利 or "women's power" in the expression *quanli* 權力—and *ziyou* 自由—which can be translated as "freedom" or "to free."

Besides the purpose of expose, the focus of the women's world is another unique aspect of *Chivalric Beauties*. The two most famous exposé novels were *Officialdom Unmasked* (*Guanchang xianxing ji* 官場現形記) (1903) by Li Boyuan 李伯元 and *Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed Over Two Decades* (*Ershinian mudu zhi guai xianzhuang* 二十年目睹之怪現狀) (1906) by Wu Jianren 吳趸人. The structure of *Chivalric Beauties* is similar to *Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed Over Two Decades*, that is, the protagonists—the exceptional women—are not only the central figures of the novel, but also the agents to connect the venues, the characters, and the events. The narrative style of *Chivalric Beauties*, however, is more like *Officialdom Unmasked*. Along with the protagonists, there are many secondary figures who appear in certain events or stories by turns. Most of them do not have direct connections, and they fade out

of the narration when their roles are completed. But what remains unchanged is the center position of female figures in the narration.

Shao's intentions of writing an exposé novel reflected her perception and acceptance of mainstream literary representations. But novels that oriented towards women's daily experience were comparatively rare. Benedict Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities*, elaborates the technique of *tour d'horizon* in literary works: "through a sociological landscape of a fixity," a hero [of the novel] can "fuse the world inside the novel with the world outside" (30). Along with the places he views or travels, this hero also shows the readers *a tour de monde*. To follow Anderson's interpretation and coin these two expressions, I would like to call *Chivalric Beauties* a novel of "tour de monde féminine" (tour of women's world). Most exposé novels at that time focused on political and social areas and aimed at exposing the problematic phenomena in open public spaces, especially restaurants, theatres, and schools. Although *Chivalric Beauties* also involved public places like villages, schools, and streets, major events happened and most stories were set in private spaces such as personal houses or gardens, in other words, the space within which most of women's activities conducted. As a woman writer, Shao presented her unique womanly perceptions. In the novel, many plots are also unified through what the main protagonists have seen or heard, so following these protagonists, the readers, as if to be placed in the midst of a courtyard or at a dining table, watch and listen to the women's stories happening around them. When the protagonists travel to certain villages, schools, or any other public spaces that mirror the close-to-life environments, the readers can also expand and connect their experiences into the real world. Such a kind of inside-and-outside experience provides the readers a

comprehensive tour of women's world in the author Shao Zhenhua's perception.

More importantly, shifting the focus from national affairs to the women's sphere, the majority of topics in *Chivalric Beauties* were related to women's usual and daily experiences. Compared to the novels that entangled women's affairs in the discourse of national salvation, *Chivalric Beauties* directly targeted the issue of women's liberation instead of conflating it with national issues. The novel *Huang Xiuqiu* 黃繡球, for example, in A Ying 阿英's opinion, was regarded as "the best work focusing on women's problem of that time" (105). However, *Huang Xiuqiu* portrayed more about women's participation into political or social reform activities rather than women's daily lives. In *Chivalric Beauties*, despite that some criticisms were targeted at official corruptions or bureaucracy and some discussions involved women's responsibility to the nation, the author Shao Zhenhua always presented opinions from the standpoint of women and clearly distinguished women's affairs from patriarchal nationalism discourse. Shao paid special attention to women's daily lives, and all the descriptions and discussions were aimed at women's affairs. The family life and women's experiences reflected in the novel were characterized with a woman's self-awareness and the profound features of women's writing. On the one hand, besides promoting women's rights, Shao also acknowledged women's responsibilities. As it is conveyed by the exceptional woman Gao Jianchen in *Chivalric Beauties*, "The nation does not only belong to men. We women also need to do our bit" (381; ch. 24). However, on the other hand, Shao questioned, through Meng Yaqing, one member of the Society of Brightness in *Chivalric Beauties*, "How can our nation become strong if our women's sphere remains so dark" (122; ch. 3)? For Shao, although she acknowledged the connection between women's issues and national

strengthening, she believed that there were more problems in the women's sphere that needed to be taken care of first. Such claim, instead of putting feminist discourse as a dependent theme to nationalist discourse, grants feminist discourse a comparatively separate and prioritized space. Within this space, women's rights and the topic of women's liberation could be presented by more independent speeches and actions that are identified with gender distinctions and women's self-awareness.

Focusing on the events and affairs of women's daily lives, Shao Zhenhua provides a detailed and refined record of women's experiences. With lucidity, she expresses subtle reflections of her views on women's sufferings and her concerns about women's problems; her notion of ideal womanhood is also expounded in *Chivalric Beauties*. In identifying these salient features, in the following section, I will start with a trace to the inspiration for the novel. Shao's own lived experiences heavily informed the characters of the novel. Each of the three central protagonists encapsulate her idealism, her own challenges with pursuing liberation, and her critical approach to the threats to women's liberation, both within and without the movement. Shao was an integral part of a vital movement of the feminist efforts of her time. The significance of self awareness in women's writings, reclaiming the space from male authors to provide a more genuine voice and source of experiences, and detailed displays of the complexity of women's family duties and burdens are all discursively expressed through her writings. Each aspect more fully informs us of Shao's writings and her yearning for a form of women's salvation that required women's self-consciousness and self-awareness.

The Significance of Women's Self-awareness and Women's Liberation

Modern scholars have increasingly acknowledged that women's writing is "an untapped resource for understanding the impact of nineteenth-century crises on the consciousness of China's elite" (Mann 283). Since the late nineteenth century, with the attention on women's situations and the promotion of women's rights, women writers' status and roles in society have gradually changed. Facing dramatic social changes, progressive and self-confident elite Chinese women actively participated in the cause of social reform with specific strategies for forming a new Chinese womanhood and a stronger nation.⁷ However, while we recognize that female authors embraced a larger imagined female community and responded to the changes of the outside world, such as wars, violence, and political reform, we should not neglect one important feature of feminine writing—the self-awareness embedded within female writing subjects. In the midst of an era when the topic of women's liberation became so widely circulated, both male and female writers tried to subtly convey prevailing ideas or solutions to women's problems through the construction of the female gender. However, female self-awareness, derived from women's intimate experiences and embedded within women's writings, functioned as a significant component of female identity and distinguished female writers from male writers.

At the turning of the twentieth century, in the discourse of Chinese women's liberation, one representation of women's self-awareness was the statement: "women must rely on [themselves] to find the joy of liberation and should never expect men to be [their] liberators" (He-Yin, "On the Question of Women's Liberation" 63). This point

⁷ Many modern scholars have claimed the significant roles that elite women played. Such as Nanxiu Qian's article "Revitalizing the Xianyuan (Worthy Ladies) Tradition: Women in the 1898 Reforms."

was highlighted by early Chinese feminist theorist He-Yin Zhen 何殷震 (ca.1884-1920?). In her article “On the Question of Women’s Liberation,” He-Yin argued that the calls for promoting women’s liberation in Chinese society can be divided into active calls and passive calls. Whereas “passive calls” referred to “those that are acted upon women and initiated by men who dangle the promise of liberation before their [women’s] eyes,” “active calls” were “the ones initiated by women themselves as they struggle to free themselves” (Ibid 59). In order to free women, it was important to make women aware of what confined them. Feeling the sense of a calling from society and driven by such a sense of duty, Shao was one of the women writers who actively participated in the women’s revolution. Enlightened by new thoughts on women’s rights, she began to consider women’s situations in terms of her own experiences. Her understandings of women’s liberation connoted the sense of “active call” defined by He-Yin. Shao turned to writing novels as a useful channel to advocate women’s rights. Through her experiences and perceptions, she presented unique female-oriented perspectives and standpoints that distinguished her from male writers.

Shao used “A Woman Scholar Who is Curious on how to Fish from Jixi City” (*Jixi wenyu nüshi* 績溪問漁女史)⁸ as her pen name when she wrote her novel. There is a Chinese proverb, “To give a man a fish, you can only feed him for a day, whereas to teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime” 授人以魚，不如授人以漁. In a broader sense, the concept of “how to fish” (*yu* 漁) generally refers to skills, knowledge and methods. As her pen name implied, Shao intended to seek ways for women’s salvation

⁸ Shao Zhenhua’s ancestral home is Jixi, but her husband was from Tongxiang 桐乡 in Zhejiang province 浙江. In the novel *Chivalric Beauties*, many stories happen in the town of Tongcheng 桐城 in Zhejiang province.

within the women's sphere. In the preface, Shao explained that her motivation of writing *Chivalric Beauties* was that "injustice provokes an outcry" (*buping zeming* 不平則鳴). Despite the differences in the degree or level of the outcries, the feeling of injustice was the same, and she had such sense of injustice for a long time. Among all the unjust phenomena, what distressed her most was "the darkness of the women's sphere" (*nüjie zhi hei'an* 女界之黑暗).

Shao did not define the meaning of "darkness" in the preface. In the novel, there are several situations that are explicitly commented on as "one of the darkness of the women's sphere" by the characters in the novel or in the voice of a critic. For example, in Chapter Three, women who live in the Golden village are so ignorant and superstitious that they believe the mouse are Holy Gods. Meng Yaqing, a member of the Society of Brightness, sighs, "How come that we women's sphere becomes so dark" (122)? In Chapter Eleven, a woman pretends to be an English teacher in order to work at the women's school operated by the Society of Brightness and tries to blackmail Meng Dimin by threatening to report her to the government as a revolutionary. It turns out that she has to get quite a lot of money in order to pay her debt. Dimin comments that women are driven to do crazy things when they are in despair, which is one of the darkness in women's sphere (209). Another example is in Chapter Twelve. Mrs. Lu, the mother-in-law of Meng Zhimin, the older sister of Meng Dimin, does not stop her son from beating Zhimin. In the voice of a critic for this situation, it says, Mrs. Lu is "one of the members who make the women's sphere so dark" (221). However, Shao illustrated various women's problems existed in women's daily life, including ignorance, mistreatment, unfairness, and disrespect, which were all representations of the "darkness." Through

exposing the “darkness” and questioning “women’s faults” (*nüzi zhiguo* 女子之過), Shao wanted to wake up women and save women from “darkness” in order to jointly seek a civilized life for women 喚醒吾女子脫離黑暗，共進文明 (85; preface).

Shao continues to express “the misfortunes of being a woman” based on her personal experiences:

It is a misfortune for me to be a woman who has to suffer all kinds of oppression. In terms of intelligence and wisdom, women are not inferior to men. However, when freedom and benefits are concerned, it is all under men’s control. Is any injustice in the world worse than this?

Unfortunately, women do not try to speak out against this unfair treatment.

Recently, people who promote women’s rights or freedom emerge.

Whereas freedom advocates are a rarity, there are thousands of people who do not believe in freedom. How difficult is it to promote women’s status and fully recover women’s rights of freedom? (85; preface)

Fully acknowledging her gender identity as “being a woman” 為女子, Shao expressed her deep discontentment on the unfair treatment of women and their unequal social status and situations. She acknowledged that more and more advocates began to promote women’s rights and women’s liberation. At the same time, Shao also realized the difficulty of the way “to promote women’s status and fully recover women’s rights of freedom” 舉吾女子而盡復其自由之權. For Shao, one reason for this difficulty was the fact that most pioneers were male intellectuals and their positions were generally based on men’s perspectives. In the words of feminist theorist He-Yin, men pursued “self-

distinction,” “self-interest,” and “self-comfort in the name of women’s liberation.”⁹

Another reason was most women were still trapped in the situation of “unfreedom” (*butou ziyou* 不自由). What made it worse was women did not bother to “try to express objections” 未嘗言其非. In other words, women chose to silently tolerate these inequities without rejection. While Shao’s comments were her personal reflections, this was probably the actual situation of Chinese women at that time. Despite the promotion and emergence of “new women” (*xin nüxing* 新女性), most Chinese women still lived with traditional norms and could not easily shake off all the conventional requirements of women’s speech and behaviors.

Besides illuminating the difficulties of promoting women’s status and rights of freedom, Shao also invited women to conduct self-examinations. She inquired, “No doubt that men are the primary problems (for women’s sufferings). Shouldn’t women also be responsible for such situations” 男子雖為禍首，抑吾女子豈無過欤 (85; preface)? While she criticized women’s weaknesses, “as timid as a mouse” and “as lazy as a cat,” Shao called for women’s mental liberation and independence. Compared to male advocates, as a woman who “has to suffer all kinds of oppression,” Shao represented a woman’s perspective. Both women’s self-awareness and her own personal experiences contributed to the active and direct appeals for women’s liberation.

Re-constructing Self and the Shaping of Exceptional Women

⁹ In her article “On the Question of Women’s Liberation,” He-Yin Zhen criticized the “sham freedom and sham equality” claimed by male intellectuals.

Chivalric Beauties not only features unique women's self-awareness, but also reflects Shao Zhenhua's self-consciousness of her own experiences and her ideal life. By studying Shao's life, I would like to examine how Shao expressed her subjective perspectives and struggles through the portrayal of women images in *Chivalric Beauties*. In the process of shaping exceptional women in her novel, Shao re-constructed herself with hopes and desires. Writing, for Shao, became what Lingzhen Wang called a "practice—an active way of negotiating one's life and identity in history" (2). In the case of Shao, such writing also provided a channel for Shao to reconstruct herself in and out of the reality.

So far there are few sources about Shao's life or education experiences. However, there is some information about her maternal family and her husband's family. Both of the two influential bibliographical works, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考 (A survey of women writers through the ages) by Hu Wenkai 胡文楷¹⁰ and *Zhongguo tongshu xiaoshuo shumu* 中國通俗小說書目 (A bibliographical study on Chinese popular fictions) by Sun Kaidi 孫楷第, mentioned Shao Zhenhua's father Shao Zuozhou 邵作舟 (literary name Shao Banqing 邵班卿), her husband Lao Anwen 勞闇文 (literary name Lao Jiongchang 勞炯章), and her father-in-law Lao Naixuan 勞乃宣 (literary name Lao

¹⁰ In *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考 (A survey of women writers through the ages), Shao Zhenhua is listed as a women poet, but *Chivalric Beauties* (*Xiayi Jiaren* 俠義佳人) is the only work listed (401). According to Huang Jin-zhu 黃錦珠, besides *Chivalric Beauties*, Shao Zhenhua published four poems on the Issue No. 19 of the journal *Pastime* (Youxi zazhi 遊戲雜誌) in 1915. These poems are "To Think of a Friend" (*huaiyou* 懷友), "Untitled" (*wuti* 無題), "Imagining the Sorrow of Ladies in the Palace" (*nigongyuan* 擬宮怨), and "Spring Times" (*chunri jishi* 春日即事). See Huang Jin-zhu, *Qingmo minchu nüzuojia xiaoshuo yanjiu: nüxing shuxie de duoyuan chengxian* 清末民初女作家小說研究：女性書寫的多元呈現 (Studies on women writer's novels at late Qing and early Republic of China: the diversity of women's writing).

Yuchu 勞玉初) (173). Huang Jin-zhu 黃錦珠, Professor of Chinese in National Chung Cheng University, has conducted comparatively thorough research on both Shao's father and her husband's family.¹¹ This research is very helpful in exploring the issues, concerns, stories, and figures presented in *Chivalric Beauties*, especially how Shao reconstructed herself in the process of shaping exceptional women in the novel.

Both Shao and her husband were born in scholarly families, and their fathers participated in reform activities as open-minded intellectuals and enlightened officials. Shao's father Shao Banqing 邵班卿 (1851-1898) was an open-minded intellectual, who highly emphasized the importance of enlightening people and learning from the West in his work *Alarmist Talk by Shao* (*Shaoshi weiyuan* 邵氏危言) (1887).¹² It is highly possible that Shao Zenhua admired and respected her father. As reflected in *Chivalric Beauties*, Shao created an open-minded father figure—Meng Dimin's uncle—Meng Borong 孟伯容, a rich and warm-hearted industrialist who is keen on social charity activities. He not only highly recognizes Dimin's ability and talent without gender prejudice, but also encourages Dimin to show her capabilities in saving women from “darkness” (Ch. 7). It was because of his full support and trust that Dimin and the Society of Brightness could have sufficient money and resources to help women. Meng Borong's ideas on business and industry operation also provided positive influences in Dimin's thoughts on promoting women's economic independence. I will discuss this point in the

¹¹ In her book, Huang Jin-zhu writes a chapter under the title “*zhufu shenfeng de nu xiaoshuojia: Shao Zenhua* 主婦身份的女小說家：邵振華” (Shao Zenhua: a woman novelist with the identity of a housewife), pp. 1-16. In this chapter, Huang explores Shao Zenhua's possible family situations based on information of her husband.

¹² See Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, *zhongguo jindai minzu sixiangshi* 中國近代民主思想史 (The history of modern Chinese democratic thoughts), p.174.

later section. What I want to focus on in this section is how the image of Gao Jianchen, together with other woman images, such as Deng Xieying and Meng Zhanru, projected Shao's reconstruction of herself in the literary world.

Chivalric Beauties presents troublesome interpersonal relationships and the complicated living environment of a big family, and these portraits are inseparable from Shao's married life. The conflicts and problems described in *Chivalric Beauties* are likely the reflections of Shao's own life experiences. Shao, like most traditional Chinese women, lived as a wife, a daughter-in-law, and a mother in a big family. Her personal experiences and deep feelings as a woman contribute to the major themes presented in the novel. Shao lived in Jixi in Anhui province before her marriage, and stayed in Suzhou and Jia Xing with her husband before they settled down in Tongxiang in Zhejiang province. Although there is no information on Shao's travel records, based on the limited scenery and locations¹³ that appeared in the novel *Chivalric Beauties*, it seems that she did not have many travel experiences. Shao's husband, Lao Jiongzhong, was the oldest son of the six children of Lao family. After his first wife died and left a daughter at the age of eight, Lao married Shao. Shao gave birth to a son and a daughter after their marriage. So in her married life, Shao had multiple identities. Besides being a wife and a mother, Shao had to undertake the responsibility as the oldest daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, and stepmother, which meant she had to take care of many people including parents-in-law, her husband, young brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, a step daughter, and her own children. The situation became even more complicated after Lao's uncle passed away, and his aunt-in-law and cousins moved in with them. Shao transformed her personal

¹³ Although there are some invented places like Golden Village, the stories mainly happened in Shanghai, Suzhou, and nearby areas, some in Tongcheng City.

experiences and her ideal married life into the portrayal of several women in the novel.

In *Chivalric Beauties*, there are two women figures that reflect Shao's real life experiences. The situation of Deng Xieying 鄧擷英 is closer to the experiences of Shao. The characters 鄧 and 邵, 擷 and 振 have similar structures, and both 英 and 華 can be used for girls' names when referring to "flowers" or "essence." The figure Xieying also has a similar family background and marriage situation. Xieying's husband Kou Dihuai 寇迪懷 is from Zhejiang Tongxiang. He marries Xieying after his first wife died and left a daughter.¹⁴ Dihuai's native place and his marital status are almost exactly like Shao's husband Lao. Gao Jianchen, the leading figure, also has certain similarities with the author Shao Zhenhua. Jianchen is the second wife of her husband Lin Feibai 林飞白. They have been married for eight years and have three children. The second son is seven and youngest daughter is three (Ch. 8). All these happen to be the same ages as Shao's own children. In addition, in the novel, it implies that Lin's aunt-in-law and cousins live with them, which also reflected the real living environment of Shao. Whereas both the images of Gao Jianchen and Deng Xieying have the shadow of Shao, these two women have totally different lives.

In the novel, Deng Xieying does not have the favor of her mother-in-law or any senior relatives of her husband's family. Her mother-in-law always satirizes her as "a daughter-in-law of the revolutionary party," or "a talented revolutionary lady" (Ch. 29). She deliberately makes Xieying's life difficult by ordering her to do errands regardless of time, place, or situation, and is always ready to find faults in Xieying's behaviors or speeches. As an open-minded woman, Xieying's behaviors and speeches are not confined

¹⁴ Detailed description can be found in Chapter Twenty-Eight and Thirty-One.

by traditional women's virtues, so it is difficult for her to make her mother-in-law and other senior women satisfied. Gradually, Xieying gives up trying to please these obstinate old women and tries to keep them at a distance. This was probably what the author Shao Zhenhua faced in her real life and the reason for her to remind women to look at the problems in the women's sphere. While people call attention to reject the suppression that comes from male domination, it is also very important to pay attention to the subjugation and torture from other women themselves.

In her book, *Personal Matters*, focusing on Chinese women's autobiography, Lingzhen Wang establishes a category called "the personal." Against the views of hypostasizing the subject as an inviolable entity and dismissing it as a passive, linguistic construction, Wang considers "the personal" as a feminist concept that "has its own dynamic history" (2). For Wang, "the personal" emerges through a dynamic process and "must be conceptualized as a site of historical interactions" (22). In this process and through interactions, historical beings "actively" participated in their own formation. Therefore, modern Chinese women write autobiographically to demonstrate their active desire to "negotiate their lives and sense of self, [and] to express their (constructed and constructing) views of history" (2). Although *Chivalric Beauties*, in the strict sense, is not an autobiography, Shao Zhenhua still utilized the technique of "the personal" and transferred her novel into a platform for negotiating women's lives more than her own. Shao's writing of her self that is projected by the image of Deng Xieying is more than a simple retrospection of her life. Rather, she purposefully selected the aspects of her life that were worth the attentions of other women. Shao tries to use herself as an example to demonstrate the comparatively common situation of a married middle-class woman,

which is generally dismissed or overlooked by dominant discourses. Along with the shaping of Deng Xieying, through Xieying's emotions and attitudes, Shao also conveys her discontent with dominant family power structures at that time. In reality, Shao is frustrated and helpless, but in her literary world, she is free to express the yearnings of her heart and the inward workings of her mind. Although Shao could not deal with the problems caused by tension among women in real life, she could negotiate her life and self and articulate "different subjectivities and alternative modes of life" (L. Wang 7) in her novel. To do so, Shao reconstructed herself by creating another self via the image of Gao Jianchen. Comparing with Deng Xieying, Gao Jianchen's married life is happier and her family life is more harmonious. If the image of Deng Xieying is the shadow of Shao Zhenhua, the life of Gao Jianchen is the dream of Shao Zhenhua. By appropriating her ideals into the shaping of Gao Jianchen, Shao imagined herself in a more harmonious family environment.

Gao Jianchen is one of the main figures in *Chivalric Beauties*. She is one year younger than Meng Dimin. The two grew up together because of the close relationship between their families. Unlike Meng Dimin and another protagonist Xiao Zhifen, Gao Jianchen has no overseas study experiences. Despite that, in Dimin's view, Jianchen is far more brilliant and talented than herself, so Dimin would always come to Jianchen for advice. Shao conveyed many ideas on women's liberation in the voice of Gao Jianchen. As an open-minded advocate of women's rights, Jianchen actively participates in the operation of the women's school and the establishment of crafts and technical schools for women. Jianchen is also different from Dimin and Zhifen in that she is the only woman who gets married among the three "free women in China" 中國的自由女子 (479; ch.

29). Besides being a women's right advocate, Jianchen is also a caring wife and a responsible mother. Jianchen's husband, Lin Feibai, is a perfect man. As an ideal husband described in *Chivalric Beauties*, Feibai is a handsome and talented young man with graceful manners. After he studied in Germany and Japan for four years, he came back to China and worked as the chief editor of a journal focusing on promoting modern knowledge and social reform. Feibai shows understandings for Jianchen and Dimin's thoughts and efforts in helping women. In addition, he provides great support and assistance whenever they need him. Jianchen not only has a harmonious relationship with her husband, but is also on good terms with other family members, which is radically different from the situation of Deng Xieying. Most of the senior women members in Lin's family are conservative without much education, but unlike Xieying's senior relatives, they dare not offend Jianchen. Instead, they usually come to Jianchen for help if they have any problems. As the chief "leader" of domestic affairs in Lin's family, Jianchen occupies a decisive position and has a pivotal role in the family. Because she is respected at home, Jianchen can play her roles as a daughter-in-law, a wife, and a mother unimpeded. Because of the comparatively harmonious family atmosphere, Jianchen can spend some time and efforts to serve both as a part-time teacher in the women's school and as an active advisor for the Society of Brightness.

From Deng Xieying to Gao Jianchen, these images are interdependent in the novel, and they are also connected with the world around them. Their lives become more representative through the engagement with cultural, social, and political situations of that time. Therefore, Shao's negotiation of her life and self also includes a kind of negotiation with contemporary society, and her transformation of self through

imagination and fantasy also contains a yearning and desire of changing certain social practices. The contrast between the family environments of Deng Xieying and Gao Jianchen imply that the author, Shao Zhenhua, desired for a more respectful and harmonious family life. For her, a harmonious family situation better enables women to engage in reformist activities. Loving and friendly familial relationships were very important, but were not easy to maintain in a big family.

In the novel, Shao also brought up thoughts on family structure through the story of Meng Zhanru. In chapter Twenty-Eight, upon her cousin Meng Zhanru's invitation, Meng Dimin, Gao Jianchen, Xiao Zhifen, and other women friends visit Meng Zhanru's new home. During their chatting, Zhanru tells them the reason why they moved out. Zhanru and her husband Kou Dichen both prefer a casual living style. However, her mother-in-law and other relatives always criticize and interfere with their life. Tired of the pressure and quarrels in the tense situation, after discussing with her husband Xieying, Zhanru decides to move out in the name of developing new businesses for her husband. They purchased a new piece of land and built a new house with gardens and farmlands, enjoying a "husband-and-wife-centered" life. The tension among family members, especially between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, senior female relatives, wives and mistresses, and sisters-in-law, was a real and a tough problem in reality. The action of Zhanru conveyed a possible solution to avoid the conflicts in the "big family," which was to establish a "small family."

The idea of "small family"—a modern family structure—was also part of modern thoughts on family reform at that time. Some scholars have acknowledged the significance of the idea of "small family" in the process of family reform. In her book,

Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953, Susan L. Glosser focused on the notion of “family” and its relationship with the struggle for social and political changes in twentieth-century China. Glosser provides a genealogy of the discursive ideals of the *xiaojiating* (small family) system. Glosser contends that the articulations of the small family ideal were important steps in the transfer of power from the individual, through the family to the state. She also argues that in the process of the New Culture Movement, during which reformers create their ideal “New Women,” the family reform was manipulated by the “young urban males” to secure their dominant positions in the family, rather than promote gender equality within the new small family form.¹⁵ In the case presented in *Chivalric Beauties*, however, instead of becoming objects of reform in order to “be made satisfactory companions for their modern husbands” (Glosser 11), women turn into active performers. It was Zhanru’s own willingness, and for the purpose of smoothing over the disputes among family members, that the young couple decides to move out. Through the case of Zhanru, Shao tried to provide a possible solution to liberate women from the burden and pressure caused by traditional big family structures. She expected to present a relatively possible and acceptable way for women to incorporate new ideas into their daily lives.

“Free Marriage” (*ziyou jiehun* 自由結婚) and Women’s Salvation

During late Qing period, with the promotion of women’s rights, people began to question traditional marriage customs and rules. Intellectuals criticized the problems caused by arranged marriage and challenged the authority of “parents’ orders” (*fumu*

¹⁵ Susan L. Glosser discusses this in the section named “Marriage, Family, Sexuality and Gender Difference” in *Chinese Visions of Family and State, 1915-1953*, pp. 7-50.

zhiming 父母之命). Instead, they advocated for “free marriage,” which became “the most sonorous voice among discussions on marriage of late Qing” 晚清婚姻論最高亢的聲音 (Xia 298).¹⁶ As the expression implies, the intention of “free marriage” was to free men and women from the passive position in arranged marriages and to empower people to make decisions of their own free will. Whereas traditional marriage stressed ethnical codes and family responsibilities, “free marriage” emphasized emotional attachment and individual rights. The husband-wife relationship based on mutual consensus before marriage was highly valued in “free marriage.” Thus, the promotion of “free marriage” was also concerned with equal rights between men and women. As a result, more and more literati, like Jin Tianhe 金天翮, regarded “the right to freedom of marriage” as one of the rights that women should recover.¹⁷ As it was reflected in literary works, many writers elaborated on the theme of “free marriage” from various perspectives. The novel, *Free Marriage* (*ziyou jiehun* 自由結婚) (1903) by Zhang Zhaotong 張肇桐 (1881-?), was one that directly associated the freedom of marriage with revolution.¹⁸

In *Chivalric Beauties*, there were also many descriptions of marriage, problems

¹⁶ In the chapter “Wanqing funü shenghuo zhong de xin yinsu” 晚清婦女生活中的新因素 (New Elements in Late Qing Women’s Life) in her book *Wanqing shehui yu wenhua* 晚清社會與文化 (Late Qing Society and Culture), Xia Xiaohong discusses many enlightened people 先進之士 who advocated “free marriage” at that time.

¹⁷ In “The Women’s Bell,” Jin Tianhe listed six rights that women should recover, including the rights to schooling, to establish friendship, to do business, to own property, to leave and return home freely, and to freedom of marriage. See *The Birth of Chinese Feminism*, pp. 254-6.

¹⁸ Zhang Zhaotong was from Wuxi city of Jiangsu province. He studied in Japan and Belgium. When he published the novel *Ziyou jiehun* 自由結婚 (Free Marriage), Zhang used the penname Zhendan nüshi ziyoushe 震旦女士自由花 (Ms Zhen Duan-a flower of freedom). The novel was published by Ziyoushe 自由社 (Freedom Publishing House) in 1903. It seems Zhang highly favored the expression of “freedom.”

between spouses, and the ideal marriage models and relationships between husband and wife. Through her portrayal, Shao Zhenhua conveyed her agreement with the concept of “free marriage,” which emphasized “autonomy” (*zizhu* 自主) and “love” (*aiqing* 愛情). But she also brought up her concerns on the potential risks caused by sham “free marriage”—a marriage disguised with fake “freedom.”

The thought that love is important in marriage is conveyed through the figure Gao Jianchen. As an active advocator for women’s rights and liberation, Jianchen condemns unfair conventions that shackle women’s minds, while also making proposals on recovering women’s rights. Jianchen’s concern extended to actions such as abolishing foot-bonding, promoting women’s education, advocating equality between men and women, and encouraging women’s independence. In terms of marriage, Jianchen has many claims that address “love” (*aiqing* 愛情) as part and parcel of marital relations.

Jealousness is a kind of love. ...If there is no jealousy (existing in married life), in my opinion, it is either because the woman is heartless, or there is no love (between the husband and wife). (362; ch. 23)

If a man is not satisfied with his wife, he usually goes out of the home for concubinage or prostitution. We should not simply blame men for their unchastity. It is because they do not love their wives devotedly. How is it possible for them not to be possessed by some evil thoughts? (667; ch. 38)

Jianchen denounces concubinage and prostitution and emphasizes the importance of love in married life. These thoughts are in line with the essence of “free marriage.” However, Jianchen also expresses reservations and doubts on “free marriage,” especially

when “freedom (free)” becomes a superficial expression. In chapter Thirty-Eight, Jianchen says, “Free marriage has many advantages, but the sham ‘free marriage’ conducted by fake reformers in China is really bad. They misunderstand the expression of ‘freedom,’ so the sham ‘free marriage’ is nothing different from concubinage” (666; ch. 38). Such a comment is inseparable with the portrayal of Jianchen’s happy married life. As the ideal couple in *Chivalric Beauties*, Feibai and Jianchen have a good husband and wife relationship. Even though they get married through an arranged marriage, they love each other and take care of each other with respect and understanding. So on the one hand, Jianchen agrees that the essence of marriage is love, but on the other hand, she does not totally object to traditional marriage customs.

In fact, the traditional wedding ceremony and the routine to propose is still valued in this novel. In Chapter Nine, Tian Rongsheng, the deputy chair of the Society of Brightness, says:

Some of our students, if they meet some nice and kind young men and want to get married, still ask for their parents’ permission or invite matchmakers to deliver the marriage proposal. They also obey the etiquettes such as offering a formal proposal, matching the “eight characters” (birth date-year, month, day, and hour) of the prospective bride and the groom, and exchanging betrothal gifts. They also follow the custom that the bridegroom needs to go the bride’s home to escort her back to the wedding.¹⁹ These rituals are not like the new style of free

¹⁹ In the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), the *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* (*Yili* 儀禮), and the *Bai Hu Tong* (*Baihutong* 白虎通), Chinese pre-wedding customs are prescribed as a series of rituals called “Three Letters and Six Etiquettes,” also known as “Three

marriage. It seems that [in the new style] people exchange photos today and get married the next day, without telling their parents and with no friends to celebrate. (190; ch. 9)

This comment shows that the author, Shao Zhenhua, agreed with some of the ideas of “free marriage,” such as men and women getting married based on their mutual attractions and out of their own free wills. But at the same time, she also accepted certain traditional marriage customs. For Shao, the ideal marriage model should be the combination of new marriage philosophy and the traditional wedding etiquettes and formal ceremony. Shao’s favor of a mixed marriage model with the new and the old implied that it was not easy to change traditional marriage customs and routines. After all, these rituals were deeply rooted in Chinese society. Shao’s concerns about free marriage also revealed a sense of awareness of women’s disadvantaged situation in society. As a woman, a weak and vulnerable member in a disadvantaged position in the

Covenants and the Six Rites” (*Sanshu liuli* 三書六禮).

The “Three Letters” refer to the engagement letter (*pinshu* 聘書), which is sent from the groom’s family to the bride’s family and serves as a confirmation of the formal arrangement of marriage; the gift letter (*lishu* 禮書), which is sent from the groom’s family with gifts to the bride’s family before the wedding and serves as a gift record that describes the value of each gift; and the wedding letter (*yingqin shu* 迎親書), which is given on the actual day of the wedding and serves as a proof that the groom’s family officially accepts the bride.

Traditionally speaking, along with preparing the three letters, a wedding also needs to incorporate six rites so that it can be considered as a completed wedding. The six traditional rites involved in a Chinese wedding are as follows: offering a formal proposal (*nacai* 納采), giving the eight characters of prospective bride to the groom’s side (*wenming* 問名), placing the eight characters of the prospective bride and that of the prospective groom at the ancestral altar to confirm compatibility (*naji* 納吉), sending betrothal gifts to the bride and return gifts to the prospective groom (*nazheng* 納征), selecting an auspicious wedding date (*qingqi* 請期), and arranging the wedding ceremony (*jinying* 親迎).

social power system, she was worried about the possible insecure situations that could arise from “free marriage.” As it is said through the character Tian Rongsheng, in the name of freedom, people were too hasty and irresponsible in deciding to get married (such as simply “exchanging photos”), and “without telling their parents and with no friends to celebrate,” which could mean no witness or protection from other people. This was really dangerous for women. After all, traditional moral norms treated men and women unequally. In real social contexts, in terms of the relationships between men and women, women usually had to obey more rules and bear more pressure, in other words, under existing social conditions, women would be particularly vulnerable to exploitation. In the novel, there were several stories about couples who got married in the name of “free marriage” but did not live happily. One extreme case was the story of Liu Feiqiong 柳飛瓊 who almost lost her life due to blindly believing in free marriage.

After graduating from the women’s school, Feiqiong thought of herself as a new woman who was “full of new expressions and enthusiastic for the thoughts of freedom” 一肚子的新名詞，滿腔的自由血. Completely hooked on the idea of free marriage 一心想著自由婚姻, she was eager to go around and meet young men in order to select an ideal husband (408; ch. 25). After she met Chu Mengshi 楚夢實, who claimed to be a returned overseas student, Feiqiong started a romantic relationship. Besides strolling in the park, traveling the street in carriages, and going to the theatre and restaurants at night together, Mengshi sometimes would send flowers or candy to Feiqiong. Feiqiong was touched by Mengshi’s sweetness, and Mengshi was attracted by Feiqiong’s natural beauty. Soon, they decided to get married according to the “new (marriage) custom” (*yile xinfa* 依了新法), that is, the bride only received a fine diamond ring instead of

exchanging betrothal gifts (*pinli* 聘禮). Without the witness of parents, relatives, or friends, on the wedding day, Mengshi put the diamond ring onto Feiqiong's finger. Without any wedding ceremony, the newlyweds went to Shanghai for the honeymoon. After they arrived in Shanghai, they rented an apartment and hired a maid to attend to Feiqiong (410-1; ch. 26).

The love story between Feiqiong and Mengshi, from actively creating chances to encounter each other, developing a romantic relationship, to adopting new style marriage customs and taking a honeymoon trip, all adhered to the new style of men-women socialization and the mode of free marriage. However, the author, Shao Zhenhua, illustrated the process in satirical tones, which not only implied her doubtfulness of these superficial practices, but also laid hints foreshadowing Feiqiong's misfortune. Feiqiong enjoyed a rich and easy life for a while, but three years later, after she gave birth to a boy, Mengshi began to become fed up with her and their ordinary life. He often stayed outside during the nights, sometimes even stayed out of the home for three months. Tired of Feiqiong's interrogations, Mengshi tricked Feiqiong and sent her and their son back to his hometown in Hunan province, while he continued his dissolute life. It was only when Feiqiong arrived at Chu's mansion that she realized her happy marriage was totally a lie. Mengshi actually already had a vicious wife at home. This ferocious woman not only did not accept Feiqiong as a concubine, but also took out her grudge and anger against Mengshi onto Feiqiong and her son. Besides torturing Feiqiong through beating and abuse, even imprisoning her without food or warm clothes, she also attempted to sell Feiqiong to other men. Even worse, Mengshi's mother, in the name of preserving family rules, fully supported the "first wife" (*dafu* 大婦) and did not even accept Feiqiong's son

as her grandson. Feiqiong's life was so miserable that she attempted to kill herself almost every day. But, she clung to life for the sake of her young and innocent son.

The depiction of Feiqiong's miserable life in Chu's family was miraculously detailed. With tears and blood, the author portrayed Feiqiong's inward sorrow, despair, and struggles when she had to bear her misfortune. Fortunately, Feiqiong's sister, who was a student of the women's school run by the Society of the Brightness, finally found out what happened to Feiqiong. With the help of Meng Dimin and Gao Jianchen's husband Lin Feibai, dying Feiqiong and her son were rescued from Chu's family and taken back to Shanghai. It was also Dimin and Feibai who served as arbitrators for Feiqiong and Mengshi's divorce.²⁰

The story of Liu Feiqiong further conveyed the sense of risk and unpredictability of free marriage. Without the intervention of other people who knew Mengshi, Feiqiong fully believed in whatever Mengshi said without any hesitation. Without the participation of any parents or senior relatives, they got married and lived alone away from their hometown. Feiqiong never attempted to learn the truth about Mengshi or verify his claims, but rather blindly believed in and practiced "free marriage" which resulted in her horrible experience. Shao Zhenhua intended to warn people of the potential danger caused by blindly following the fantasy of freedom. Despite of the disadvantages of traditional marriage conventions, there were still some reasons for their existence. For example, family backgrounds and the authority of parents or relatives behind marriages usually offered a kind of protection. The style of free marriage granted much freedom for people, but without certain restrictions and boundaries, it may also have led to extreme

²⁰ Detailed depiction is in Chapter Twenty-Six and Twenty-Seven.

situations that left women unprotected.

From the portrayal of Gao Jianchen to the story of Liu Feiqiong, *Chivalric Beauties* manifested the author's understandings and considerations of the new style marriage—free marriage. On the one hand, *Chivalric Beauties* fully supported the concept of free marriage. Through the voice of Gao Jianchen, mutual willingness and emotional attachment were highly accepted and praised as the foundation of a harmonious marriage. By illustrating a successful marriage between Gao Jianchen and Lin Feibai, the author expressed her admiration and expectation for a happy marriage. Yet, on the other hand, *Chivalric Beauties* also conveyed doubts whether or not free marriage was reliable, and if it was reliable, how the new style of marriage could be carried out in reality. The depiction of Liu Feiqiong's terrible experience and failed marriage implied the sense of upset and insecurity brought on by the “free” marriage and the unprotected situations caused by hasty and irresponsible decisions in the name of sham “freedom.” Therefore, *Chivalric Beauties* serves as a warning to the free marriage. In Shao's interpretation, without certain kinds of protection, women will easily fall into the traps of a fake “free” marriage.

While Shao Zhenhua called attention to the issues of marriage itself, she also expressed her ideas on women's family life. For young women, they might have more chances to seek a happy or reliable marriage like the exceptional woman, Gao Jianchen, as long as they would not blindly fall into the trap of a sham free marriage like the character Liu Feiqiong. Yet, for married women like Shao Zhenhua herself, searching for ways to improve married life was a more practical issue. Through *Chivalric Beauties*, Shao Zhenhua conveyed that women's liberation was also concerned with the following

questions. How should women be released from real family burdens? How could women manage the household with modern techniques? How should women gain respect through working (at or outside home) and achieve economic independence?

The Complexity of Women's Family Duties and Burdens and Women's Salvation

For thousands of years, women were confined to the inner chamber with lifelong responsibilities of taking care of family members and running the household. This arrangement was closely related to the traditional norms of women's virtues defined by patriarchal society. Foucault believes that the bourgeois society and modern capitalism replaced the absolute monarch and exercised a positive kind of power—power over life—by emphasizing what people *should* do and through “the procedures of power that characterized the disciplines” (“Right of Death and Power Over Life” 139). In China, *The Four Classics for Women*, especially *The Analects on Women*,²¹ prescribe expectations and behavioral norms for women, which also functioned as a kind of power, in the sense that the masculine power deployed the power over life by creating “docile women.”

In *The Analects on Women*, “a virtuous woman” differs from “a lazy woman,” “an evil woman,” and “a shrewish woman” based on whether, and how, a woman performs her duty of “serving” her husband and senior family members like parents and parents-in-

²¹ *The Analects on Women* has twelve chapters. They are “Establishing Oneself as a Person” (*lishen* 立身), “Learning How to Work” (*xuezu* 学作), “Ritual Decorum: Learning Proper Etiquette” (*xueli* 学礼), “Rising Early [to Begin Household Work]” (*zaoqi* 早起), “Serving One's Parents” (*shifumu* 事父母), “Serving One's Parents-in-Law” (*shijugu* 事舅姑), “Serving a Husband” (*shifu* 事夫), “Instructing Sons and Daughters” (*xunnanmü* 训男女), “Managing the Household” (*guanxia* 管家), “Entertaining Guests” (*daike* 待客), “Maintaining Harmonious Family” (*herou* 和柔), and “Preserving Chastity” (*shoujie* 守节).

law. According to the requirements, the main duty of a “virtuous woman” (*xianfu* 賢婦) is “to serve” (*shi* 事) and toil for her husband and parents-in-law after she gets married. The duties require a woman to take good care of the whole family’s daily life like a caregiver and obey the orders of her husband and parents-in-law without question.²² The most obvious representations of “a virtuous woman” seem to be physically preparing hot food and warm clothes for her husband and senior family members, mentally pleasing them and making them satisfied, and devoting her whole life to taking care of the details in the management of the household. Functioning like a technique of control, *The Analects on Women* sets up standards for women’s behaviors, but the judgment on women’s performance—whether and how the performance is perceived or credited—is usually left up to social authorities and the power system. Therefore, in reality, the issue of women’s family duty is complicated by many factors, such as the socioeconomic system of the society, the moral orthodoxy and practices in different areas, and the wealth condition and class status of a family. In addition, not only do people have different understandings of what women’s real family duties are and how to conduct these duties, but also disagree on how well the duties have been performed or should be accomplished. What’s more, there is a difference between “family duty” and “family burden.” Because of various understandings and interpretations, not all family duties would be considered

²² Contrarily, the woman who sleeps till midday, goes to the kitchen without properly washing and dressing up, cooks in a hurry, or does not serve food on time is a “lazy woman” (*lanfu* 懶婦). The woman who roars at the seniors, complains that her work is laborious, does not obey the orders (of her husband and parents-in-law) with rude and arrogant attitudes, or does not care whether her husband and parents-in-law are hungry or cold is an “evil woman” (*efu* 惡婦). A woman who is angry at her husband, contradicts what her husband says, picks a quarrel or tussles with her husband is a “shrewish woman” (*pofu* 潑婦).

as “burdens.” Therefore, women’s family burdens that arise out of their duties need to be treated differently from case to case.

At the turning of the twentieth century, the issue of women’s family duties and status became a controversial topic. Male reformers claimed that women were confined in the inner chambers and isolated from the outside world, which greatly hindered women from ridding themselves and the society of poverty and backwardness. Some male reformers, like Liang Qichao, proposed that women should be released from the family walls and participate in the society as independent “profit makers” (*shengli zhe* 生利者) (“On Women’s Education” 190-1). Other male reformers, like Jin Tianhe, called for women’s attention to their public duty of patriotism and national salvation (218). However, female feminists, such as He-Yin Zhen, questioned whether these proposals could truly liberate women. He-Yin questioned whether women who seemed to have physical freedom, like working women, could “be saved” from family burdens. He-Yin argued that liberating women’s bodies had nothing to do with the liberation of mind (“On the Question of Women’s Liberation” 55). Furthermore, rather than simply becoming working women, women’s liberation must begin with an economic revolution (“Economic Revolution and Women’s Revolution” 103).

As a novel focusing on women’s daily life, *Chivalric Beauties* presents many problems related to the debate of women’s family duties, especially the tasks of taking care of the whole family as caregivers²³ and managing the household as housewives. Through the novel, *Chivalric Beauties*, the author, Shao Zhenhua, also expressed her

²³ I use the term “caregivers” in the broader sense that women provide direct and extensive care to family members, and the family members are not limited to sick or weak persons.

response to the debate on the relationship between women's family duties, family burdens, and women's liberation. Shao articulated her interpretation of economic independence and the important roles women played as both caregivers and working women. The various stories illustrated in *Chivalric Beauties* reveal the complexity of women's family duties and burdens. By presenting this complexity, Shao expressed her thoughts by considering women's real life situations. Like He-Yin, Shao agreed that one of the goals for women's liberation was to solve the problems and reduce the burdens that related to women's family duty. She also called attention to the diverse elements involved in the issue of women's family duties and burdens. Through the portrayal of exceptional women, Shao not only revalued women's family duty as caregivers in modern concepts and situations, but also provided examples on how women could promote their status through economic independence by either managing the household with modern technologies or working outside of the home, like career women.

The stories presented in *Chivalric Beauties* happen in families from different classes and with different educational and financial backgrounds. The diversity of family backgrounds becomes a vital factor that influences women's family duties and burdens. In *Chivalric Beauties*, women of wealthy families or middle-class families do not need to do any specific housework. Without any worries about daily expenses, some women inadvertently get into the habit of idling away their time. Instead of spending time and effort managing the household and looking after family members, they have more time to expend more energy on extravagant care of their appearances in order to please their husbands. This situation was exacerbated through a misinterpretation of traditional codes on women's manner/appearance (*furong* 婦容). In addition, instead of maintaining good

relationships with family members, they use all possible means to gain power. Because they believe that, if they cannot have the favor of the male authority—represented by male figures such as the father, the son, or the husband—or depend on the male power to back them up, they have to establish their own power by suppressing other women, within or outside the family. As a result, generations of young women, such as daughters-in-law, or women in lower ranks in the family, such as concubine or mistresses, refuse to show respect or obey orders. They treat the action of refusing to perform their duties as a way of challenging the authority of the senior women generations, like mothers-in-law, or women in higher rank in the family, like the “first wife.” The generations of senior women or women in higher ranks, of course, will not miss any chances to manipulate and abuse their “legitimate” power. They always plan on how to impose the so-called duties, such as deliberately making daughters-in-law’s lives miserable by giving orders to them without any flexibility.

Chivalric Beauties presents quite a few stories about the conflicts and troubles between women generations. An example of a mother-in-law abusing her power is the story of Mrs. Chen in Chapter Thirty-Five. Mrs. Chen is notorious for abusing her daughter-in-law in Yangyin city. Claiming herself as the mother-in-law who has the absolute power to “teach” the daughter-in-law, Mrs. Chen does not allow the daughter-in-law to do up her hair, have new clothes, meet people, or visit her maternal family. Mrs. Chen and her own daughter, however, enjoy luxurious and lavish lives. Even worse, Mrs. Chen forbids her son to live with his wife and asks the daughter-in-law to cook and eat separately from them with very limited food. The parents of the daughter-in-law passed away and she “cannot speak out any reasons” 說不出什麼道理 against Mrs. Chen. That

is to say, the daughter-in-law cannot rely on her parents to stand up for her, nor can she fight or argue with Mrs. Chen with any “legitimate” reasons to defend her rights. With frustrations and helplessness, the daughter-in-law has to accept that she has married to the Chen family, and it is her fate and her duty to obey Mrs. Chen’s orders, so she has no choice but to tolerate the misery. Compared with this inarticulate and uneducated daughter-in-law, Meng Dimin’s older sister Meng Zhimin is an eloquent and well-educated woman. However, she still cannot get rid of the problems caused by the conflicts among the women in the family (Ch. 12 and Ch. 13). Since Zhimin bought a beautiful maid named Cai’er, her quiet married life is interrupted. Yielding to Cai’er’s seduction and instigation, Zhimin’s husband, Lu Yiyun, gradually spends more time with Cai’er and even decides to marry her as his second wife. Zhimin attempts to expel Cai’er away by all means—including extreme measures such as beating Cai’er with a cane and destroying all the furniture and belongings in Cai’er’s bridal chamber. However, both Yiyun and his mother Mrs. Lu are on the side of Cai’er. Yinyun even beats Zhimin heavily and refuses to go to her room any more. Through support from Yiyun and Mrs. Lu, Cai’er becomes more aggressive and challenges Zhimin without fear. Even worse, Mrs. Lu, instead of blaming her son for his inappropriate behaviors, asks Zhimin to accept Cai’er and to fulfill her duty as the “first wife,” that is to maintain the family harmony.

From Mrs. Chen’s daughter-in-law to Meng Zhimin, they are both required to fulfill their family duties as a daughter-in-law or the “first wife.” But, it is the brutal mentality and the manipulation of traditional norms of women virtues that turn their duties into some kind of burdens. Based on these examples from the novel, some male

advocators' claim that releasing women from the home could not actually "save" women from family burdens. The author, Shao Zhenhua, like feminist He-Yin Zhen, emphasized that it was the mental burdens that hindered women from modern and liberal lives. Besides negative social norms, harmful local customs can also result in burdens for women, especially for the uneducated women from the lower class. In the novel, Shao criticized those bad practices through the character Meng Zhanru: "Women of humble families in Tongcheng City only know three things: binding feet, comparing dressing and jewelry, and tussling with concubines or mistresses 繞小足，講妝飾，軋姘頭" (462; ch. 28). For these women, appearance, dressing, and fighting against other women who have "stolen" their husbands are part of their family duties, and these duties become their burdens that are also mental problems. Only mental liberation can truly "save" these women.

Compared to women with high social and economic status, lower-class women have more physical freedom. However, as a result from so-called "freedom," women of lower class have to suffer from physical burdens along with mental burdens. Because lower-class women could hardly depend on men's labor alone to support the family, they have no choice but to go out to work or sell their labor as bondservants in order to earn their keep. In many situations, instead of raising children, taking care of the senior members, and managing household, economically supporting the family becomes a lower-class women's main duty. Even though these women "enjoy" a comparative freedom of the body, they actually suffer the most ruthless exploitation and the most shameful humiliation. The story of nursemaid Mother Xu (Ch. 25) proves this opinion.

Mother Xu's husband was a private teacher at a small village. After he acquired the bad habit of taking opium, he became so lazy that he loafed around doing nothing but gambling. Due to gambling, he lost all the farm fields he owned, so Mother Xu has to work as a maid in order to support the family at a very young age. Since then, her husband totally depended on Mother Xu's earnings to feed himself. When Mother Xu left the home for work, her daughter was only three years old. Mother Xu had planned to ask her own mother to take care of her daughter. She thought that as long as she could work and sent some money to her mother, she could raise her daughter till she grows up. However, worried that Mother Xu would give away all the money to raise their daughter instead of supporting him, Mother Xu's husband refuses her proposal. Instead, he sells their daughter to another family as a child bride (*tongyangxi* 童養媳)²⁴ at a very cheap price. Even though Mother Xu tried to prevent her daughter from being taken away, she could not stop her husband from being cruel and heartless. Instead of taking care of her young baby, Mother Xu had to nurse other people's children. What deeply grieved Mother Xu was the fact that no matter how hard she worked, she still could not save her daughter. Rather than caring about their daughter who was almost dying, her husband kept spending all her earnings in gambling. Both the physical and mental sufferings made Mother Xu's life hard and miserable.

For the lower-class women who are immersed in the "local customs" in Tongcheng City, their family duties are to gain their husband's favor and fight with

²⁴ *Tongyangxi* 童養媳 literally means "child (*tong* 童) raised (*yang* 養) daughter-in-law (*xi* 媳)." It was a tradition of arranged married in pre-modern China, in which a family would adopt a pre-adolescent daughter as a future bride for one of their pre-adolescent sons (some times infants). The children would be raised together and the marriage would usually occur after they had reached puberty.

whoever endangers their power positions. Like women from higher class, their burdens are mental and caused by the bad habit of idleness, the lack of self-discipline and self-esteem. For other lower-class women, such as Mother Xu, a hard-working wife but a sad mother, physical confinement is not the main problem for their liberation. Along with mental burdens, they also suffer from physical exploitation. Therefore, to save lower-class women from family burdens means to liberate them physically and mentally. But the question is: how to do it, or how to enlighten women for modern lives? The author implicitly expressed her thoughts on this question through the voices of exceptional women in *Chivalric Beauties*.

The Yearning for Moderate and Pragmatic Methods on Women's Salvation

In terms of how to liberate and enlighten women, *Chivalric Beauties* conveyed the author Shao Zhenhua's belief that women's liberation advocates needed to be moderate and pragmatic. This opinion was expressed through the character Xiao Zhifen. Compared with Gao Jianchen and Meng Dimin, the figure of Xiao Zhifen is a more realistic woman with modern ideas. The first appearance of Zhifen in the novel is very impressive. In Chapter Four, Hua Jianquan, a member of the Society of Brightness, gives a lecture to the women in the Golden Village. At the lecture, Jianquan emphasizes that "compassion is common to all human" 惻隱之心，人皆有之，and the Society of Brightness is an organization that thinks highly of "benevolence" (*ren* 仁). She claims that people should not be categorized as the honorable, the humble, the rich, and the poor. Jianquan tries to promote the idea that instead of denigrating people of lower classes, the honorable and the rich should help and protect the humble and the poor. In her words,

“loving others should be the primary guidance” 以愛人為本. After hearing the lecture, a young lady asks with a challenging tone: “Does the Society of Brightness really practice the sense of ‘benevolence’ or does it only exist in name? Do you talk about ‘benevolence’ because the Society of Brightness gains the reputation for its benevolence or because the topic of ‘benevolence’ will bring you honor?” She further argues:

Today you claim that your lecture can turn many women into kind persons and lead women to civilized lives. Isn’t it too easy if you can make such great achievement only through a simple speech? According to this reasoning, if people want to succeed in anything, they can make it just by sending several people around and giving lectures. Does it make any sense? You have no fault in promoting ideas through lectures and discussing the concept of “benevolence.” However, your lecture is full of empty talks without any practical suggestions. If your organization truly takes conducting benevolent deeds as your duty, you should start with basic and fundamental things. Never learn from the people who only go around crying for help superficially and actually fish for fame and credit. (137-8; ch. 5)

This young lady later turns out to be Xiao Zhifen. Her comments imply the author’s concern about the interpretations and practices of the concept of “benevolence” (*ren* 仁) during the course of women’s liberation. As the first and most important virtue among the Five Constant Virtues of Confucianism, the concept of “benevolence” was broad and open to interpretation. One of the essential manifestations is to promote harmony among people by showing love and compassion for other people and avoiding

wrangling with others or conducting evil deeds. In *Chivalric Beauties*, the author's attitude towards the ambiguity of "benevolence" is represented through different women figures. On the one hand, the author agrees that the lack of "benevolence" is one of the reasons for the conflicts and troubles among people, especially women, so the topic of "benevolence" is utilized in the lecture presented by members of the Society of Brightness as content for mental cultivation. On the other hand, the author also worries that excessive benevolence could become the source of endless troubles. One example of this kind of worry is conveyed through the discussion between Gao Jianchen and Xiao Zhifen when they talk about Meng Dimin's personalities. They both think Dimin is a wise and nice person, but Dimin's greatest shortcoming is that she is "too benevolent" 仁愛心太重. Due to her "benevolence," she is too kind to dismiss those who are dishonest and incapable from the Society of Brightness. They think that this style of benevolence is "no different from letting an ulcer grow and will bring great disasters afterwards" (368; ch. 23). The ambiguity regarding benevolence is further reflected through the interpretation of its concept. For the author, the core concept of benevolence—loving others with care and compassion—did represent a kind of virtue, but such care and concern needed to be practiced in specific actions with true attentiveness. Instead of elaborating on this concept, the author implicitly transferred her interpretations into the illustration of her ideal self in the novel—the exceptional woman Gao Jianchen.

Jianchen turns down Dimin's offer of working for the Society of Brightness in Shanghai. Instead of working in a full time position away from home, Jianchen chooses to stay at home and spend more time fulfilling her duties as a wife and a mother. While

she attends to other affairs, she still can take good care of her family. For example, in Chapter Twenty-Two, Jianchen asks her husband if he has had breakfast while she is washing her face. In Chapter Thirty-Five, while she is chatting with some visitors, Jianchen reminds her maid to prepare food for the children. Jianchen's caring of her family occurs almost anywhere and at anytime. Because Jianchen truly loves her husband and children, the identity of a caregiver is not a burden but a way of expressing her "love for others." Within *Chivalric Beauties*, in a narrow sense and as a general practice, women's benevolence was presented as truly caring about family members. In other words, truly caring about family members is not because of a tradition or custom but based on a deep love. This love and care is the first basic step to begin caring for and being benevolent towards others. In a broad sense and as a moral behavior for national salvation, showing women's love and caring for others could be represented through the act of "looking after the injured soldiers" 替軍人們裹傷伺疾 (381; ch. 29). In Chapter Twenty-Four, Feibai claims that he would rather die in the battlefields for the independence of the nation than become a slave of a subjugated nation. Responding to her husband's determination, Jianchen, together with Dimin and Zhifen, also expressed their willingness to participate in the battles by doing what they believe women are good at—taking care of people. Such narrative bears a strong parallel to the popularization of the story of Florence Nightingale, who was regarded as a brave woman devoted to the cause of national salvation²⁵ and a guide leading to a brighter future.²⁶ As discussed in

²⁵ Both *Women's World* (*nüzi shijie* 女子世界) and *China's New Women Magazine* (*zhongguo xin nüjie zazhi* 中國新女界雜誌) published the story of Florence Nightingale. The two versions of Nightingale's biography were translated and rewritten by two people and the Chinese translations of the name "Nightingale" were different. In *Women's World* 女子世界 (1904, Issue 5), the article was entitled "The Biography of Nandi

previous sections, Shao Zhenhua focused more on women's liberation, so methods of contributing to national salvation were not the major concerns in *Chivalric Beauties*. In fact, Dimin does plan to run a hospital, but it is for the purpose of relieving women from pains and diseases.

Although Jianchen, who loves both her family and the country, occupies the novel as an ideal woman, the author did not believe cultivating women with benevolent mentality was the key method of saving women. That's why she created the character Xiao Zhifen whose image and thoughts were quite different from Jianchen. Believing more in "moderate and pragmatic actions" (*shixing* 實行) rather than "mere formalities" (*xutao* 虛套), Zhifen is strongly opposed to "empty talks without pragmatic solutions or moderate plans" 說的多是空言, 不見實行. She thinks the action of giving lectures itself cannot make any differences to women's lives, whereas conducting manageable and realizable actions is more useful and urgent. Zhifen's criticisms are quite trenchant with a direct critique of advocates in word but not in deed. After Zhifen's debate with Jianquan

Dai'er—A Woman Caregiver at the Battlefield" (*junzhen kanhufu nandi dai'er zhuan* 軍陣看護婦南的待爾傳) translated by Ji An 機庵. Whereas in *China's New Women Magazine* 中國新女界雜誌 (Feb. and Mar. 1907, Issue 1 and 2), the articles were entitled "The biography of Madame Naiting Ge'er—the Founder of Cosmopolitan Red Cross Women Caregivers Group" (*chuangse wanguo hongshizi kanhudui zhe Naiting Ge'er furen zhuan* 創設萬國紅十字看護婦隊者奈挺格爾夫人傳) by Jin Xia 巾俠. However, the images of Nightingale as a woman caregiver who went along with the army fighting for the national liberation and serving at the battlefield were similar. In reality, many Chinese exceptional women were compared to Nightingale, such as the first Chinese female doctor Zhang Zhujun 張竹君 (1876-1964), and Kang Aide 康愛德 (Ida Kahn) (1873-1931), who was not only known as a professional woman doctor, but also famous because she operated many hospitals in China from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century.

²⁶ Nightingale was portrayed as "the Lady with the Lamp" (*tideng nüshen* 提燈女神) because she always took good care of wounded soldiers at night. In Chinese, "lamp" (*deng* 燈) was associated with "light" which connotes "brightness" and "hope," and the lamp generally functions as a token of a bright and prosperous future.

during that lecture, Dimin gets to know her via the introduction of Jianchen. Admiring her talents and new thoughts, Dimin invites her to be an adviser of the Society of Brightness. Knowing that Dimin has sufficient funds to help women, Zhifen brings up many proposals, including setting up branches of the Society of Brightness in places where women are truly in need, establishing poverty relief offices, women's schools, and women's technical schools and factories (*nü gongyichang* 女工藝廠). The women's technical schools and factories are highly recommended by Zhifen. She says:

Nowadays, due to the backward social atmosphere and common practices (*fengqi weikai* 風氣未開), most women still do not understand the benefits of education 讀書的益處. Some women's schools have the subject on making crafts, however, they do not highly value it. If we establish women's technical schools and factories, we can teach women some knowledge and techniques on making crafts as the main task, whereas educating and cultivating them is secondary. Most women, knowing that they come to learn how to make crafts with modern techniques, will join the factories with more enthusiasm than attending the schools. ... Every day, after learning how to read and write for one or two hours, students will spend the rest of the time learning how to make crafts, so they will not feel tired from any kinds of learning. In addition, the crafts they make can be sold for profit and these profits can be given back to them based on the evaluations of their performance. By doing this, the women's crafts technique schools and factories will not lose money, and the students can

make a profit and learn knowledge and techniques. Who will not come?
(176; ch. 8)

Xiao Zhifen's promotion of women's technical schools and factories reflected the trend that women could work more professionally and earn economic independence. It also echoes the idea that women must receive education in practical knowledge and skills in order to change the idle and useless status as well as to become productive labors promoted in *Nü xuebao*. Through Zhifen's voice, the author Shao Zhenhua expressed her understanding of the key issues of women's education at that time. For Shao, women's schools may provide better education to enlighten women and lead them to mental liberation; however, comparatively speaking, cultivating women imperceptibly through ways that women are interested in can achieve better results than cramming them with theories and reasons. Students of technical schools and factories, while they are learning practical skills, can make some money from the products they made, through which they can not only experience the joy of achievement, but also learn how to make their time more valuable and meaningful. Both the skill they learn in the school and the money they earn from their own hard work could also help women better arrange their family lives, either economically or scientifically.

At the turning of the twentieth century, more and more women's magazines were popular among Chinese women, and more articles gradually introduced or discussed how Western housewives managed the household or women's work outside the family with modern techniques.²⁷ As a reflection of such trend, in *Chivalric Beauties*, teaching

²⁷ Women's magazines published in early twentieth century, such as *Funü shibao* 婦女時報 (1911-1917) and *Funü Zazhi* 婦女雜誌 (1917-1931), had more articles about Western women's daily lives.

women modern knowledge and techniques is not limited to crafts-making. Meng Zhanru, based on the situation of Tongcheng City, proposes to run a school on silkworm-raising. Although most families in Tongcheng City keep silkworms, most of the women do not know how to best raise them. For example, a woman is astonished to hear that silkworms should be raised in a special room with strict controls on temperature, humidity, and hygiene. Zhanru also asks Dimin to open a fruit-canning factory so that she can develop her huge backyard into an orchard. According to Zhanru, if exploited properly, they can turn the harvest into eighty thousand cans of fruits. After selling them in Shanghai, deducting all the expenses like rent, wages for workers, and other incidentals, they still can make three thousand yuan.

From women's educational schools and silkworm-raising schools to women's technical schools and factories, fruit canning factories, and women's hospitals, all are representations of "practical industries" (*shiye* 實業). With the growing concerns over women's roles and status outside the family, the discussions on how women could work independently and gain respect gradually emerged. *Chivalric Beauties* responded to this dialogue with practical proposals. With modern knowledge and techniques, instead of being forced to work outside of the home and having no choice but simply selling labors, women could choose to either work at home or work in professional industries.

Conclusion

Focusing on the women's affairs, Shao Zhenhua transformed her personal experiences and events that she had witnessed or heard about in women's daily life into vivid stories presented in the novel *Chivalric Beauties*. With a sense of women's self-

awareness, she called attention to the problems—the darkness—that appeared in women's daily lives and within women's own sphere in order to encourage women to seek the way for liberation by themselves. Through her personal experiences and observations, Shao expressed subtle reflections on women's real suffering. Compared with male advocates for women's liberation, Shao conveyed a unique female-oriented perspective, and actively initiated women's liberation from the standpoint of a woman.

In *Chivalric Beauties*, while exposing the problems of women's sphere, Shao also created a group of women reformers and activists for women's rights, each of whom present distinctive characteristics in the process of dealing with these problems. Through the diversity of this kind of exceptional women, Shao expressed her interpretations of new womanhood. Such diversity also showed different understandings of modern concepts, such as freedom and equality, as well as the concerns on the issue of free marriage, and the complexity of women's family duties and burdens involved in women's married lives.

Compared with the other two types radical exceptional women, who are closely associated with actions of killing, either self or others, the exceptional women portrayed in *Chivalric Beauties* are more concentrated on salvation with specific concerns on how to live better in moderate and pragmatic ways, as well as how to truly liberate women, both physically and mentally. Also unlike the other two types of exceptional women whose actions are directly tied up with the national discourse, intentionally or not, the exceptional women in *Chivalric Beauties* treat women's problems and national issue separately. Although they acknowledge the close relationship between the discourses of

women and the nation, they prefer to focus on solving women's problems in women's sphere before they claim their contributions to the national salvation.

Despite the differences among the three types of exceptional women, their ultimate goal is the same, that is, to fight for women's modern and better lives through the struggles for women's liberation and national salvation. In the process of achieving this goal, their attitude towards the question of life and death, their practices involved in the actions of killing and saving, and their utilization of the power associated with life and death all become valuable and significant factors. In addition, because Chinese norms and traditions are re-interpreted and re-evaluated in a modern context, as well as foreign thoughts and influences are adapted and appropriated with the consideration of China's own situations, these exceptional women, through their attitudes and actions associated with the question of life and death, present the uniqueness of Chinese modernity.

CONCLUSION

At the end of her book, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, Tani E. Barlow says,

Women is a hallucinatory subject where it appears in feminist theory, for, as decades of scholarship have established, women have virtually nothing in common when differences of class, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, social standing, political affiliation, and cultural practice are properly calculated and described. And as the roots of women is excavated and its systematic origins in many highly questionable philosophic and theoretical projects of the modern era are also tabulated and aired, the project of feminism will necessarily still go on. (363)

Barlow's argument not only acknowledges the diversity and complexity attached to the profound term and concept of "women," but also points out the significance and necessity of exploring the extended connotations and influences associated with "women." Indeed, at late Qing China, in the background of political reform and social transformation, "women"—the sensitive but significant trope—was considered as a dynamic agent, whose cultural, social, and political identity and function were compellingly prominent in the discourses of national salvation. As Joan Judge has claimed, "Those engaged in what was deemed to be the struggle for China's national survival tied the women question to the pressing political and cultural questions of the

era, keeping women at the increasingly secularized core of Chinese society as the objects and subjects of national reforms” (*The Precious Raft of History* 8). Along with the development of nationalist discourse, political and literary representations unavoidably entangled issues and concerns of feminist emancipation, intentionally or not. Moreover, in the process of searching for ways to achieve Chinese modernity, narratives and rhetoric related to womanhood were also complicated by the practices of reevaluating and reinterpreting Chinese traditions as well as modifying and appropriating foreign influences.

Among all the kinds of womanhood, I focused on “the exceptional women” (*nü haojie* 女豪傑), a group of diverse women who were popularly presented in late Qing narratives but are comparatively less studied in modern scholarship. Through exploring the implication and complexity within the shaping, publication, and circulation of exceptional women, and by studying the values presented by the characters, real historical figures or imagined literary ones, I intended to present another model of femininity that could reveal how late Qing literati responded to the dramatic change of the world. Within this category, I further designated three types of exceptional women: female martyr, radical female assassins with scientific ideas, and feminist reformers and activists for women’s rights. Each type of woman, through their interpretations on the concept of life and death and their power over this issue, as well as their desires for better lives, reveals that Chinese literati were reevaluating China’s own tradition while appropriating Western influence within the nationalist and feminist discourses. In doing so, I hope to provide another lens or framework to study Chinese women, political discourse, and modernity at this time. Along with the womanhood during this time and in

these discourses studied by other scholars, exceptional women can also provide a new approach to study women and their participation in the discourse of Chinese modernity.

The shaping of exceptional woman also reflected the popularization of famous female figures, whether they originated in China's own tradition or were introduced from the West. Such popularization was further circulated because of the flourishing print culture as well as the platform provided by various kinds of literary genres. For example, in the case of Hui Xing, her image as a modern mother figure and a determined women's education pioneer was vividly presented in the "new play," *The Story of Lady Hui Xing*. In *The Stone of Goddess Niiwa*, the idea of "women's transformation" conveyed by the illustration of Jin Yaose and her sisters was achieved through "chivalric science fantasy," and was further highlighted by the form of character-oriented fiction commentary. And finally, for *Chivalric Beauties*, as a semi-verisimilitude fiction written by a woman author with female-oriented perspective and the feature of "semi-autobiography," the genre of novel functions as an agency and a technique for gentry women to communicate with their women audiences and encourage them to face and solve the problems that existed within women's own sphere. These examples show that circulation and literary genres played significant roles in popularizing exceptional women.

However, the exceptional women I reviewed in this dissertation were not the only popular female figures at that time, or the only exceptional women who deserve more examination. There were also other exceptional women in later period of time who are worth further exploration, because exceptional women continued to actively participate and influence the transformation of Chinese society. The influence of exceptional women in terms of female martyrdom and assassination were particularly prevalent.

Female martyrdom was once again utilized as a powerful agent to make women's voices heard nationwide during the New Culture Movement. On November 14, 1919, in Changsha (Hunan province), a twenty-two year old girl, Zhao Wuzhen 趙五貞, who was greatly influenced by the "New Culture," killed herself in the bridal sedan chair on her way to the marriage ceremony in order to fight against arranged marriage. This tragedy soon triggered a national discussion on the traditional marriage system and the freedom of women. In the days following this tragedy, *Da Gong Bao* (Changsha) received dozens of articles from scholars in the educational circle and influential people in the press circle. These people not only expressed deep sympathy to Zhao, but also extended discussions into broader social problems such as the marriage system and ethnic doctrine, as well as women's liberation and integrity. Among these articles, Mao Zhedong 毛澤東 published nine articles, including "The Critique on Ms. Zhao's Suicide" 對趙女士自殺的批評, "Ms. Zhao's Individuality" 趙女士的人格問題, "The Evil of the Society and Ms. Zhao" 社會的萬惡與趙女士, "Not a Suicide" 非自殺, "The Problem of Superstition on Marriage" 婚姻上的迷信問題. In his articles, Mao pointed out the deeper reasons behind Zhao's suicide, that were "the corruption of marriage system, the darkness of social regime," which resulted in women "not being able to express independent will and love with freedom."¹ Along with analyzing the negative influence of social structure, Mao also discussed the impact of Zhao's suicide. Despite the rejection of the practice of suicide, Mao acknowledged Zhao's desire to seek her own life and her spirit of rebellion through the act of committing suicide. Mao claimed, "Was the primary intention of Ms.

¹ This critique is from Ma Zedong's article, "The Critique on Ms. Zhao's Suicide," which was published by *Da Gong Bao* (Changsha) on Nov. 16th, 1919.

Zhao to die (*qiushi* 求死)? No, it is to live (*qiusheng* 求生).”² Mao further argued, “People are supposed to aim to live... The reason for people to respect heroic suicide is not because of the practice of suicide itself; rather, it is out of the respect to the audacious spirit presented by those suiciders when they fearlessly fight against the dominant power 反抗強權.”³ Therefore, in Mao’s opinion, Zhao’s suicide highlighted the valuable belief of “without freedom, rather to die” 不自由毋寧死, and Zhao protected her individuality and freedom of choice with her blood and life. With more intellectuals acknowledged the impact of Zhao Wuzhen’s death, both the compassion towards Zhao’s experience and the recognition of her bravery to protect women’s freedom of choice gradually generated quite a few literary works, such as *Forced Marriage* (*lüehun* 掠婚).⁴

Zhao Wuzhen’s suicide, just like Hui Xing’s suicide, aroused national attention. Also like Hui Xing, Zhao Wuzhen was regarded as a national figure, and Zhao was memorialized as an exceptional woman who fought for women’s freedom and right of marriage. Suicide, once again, was utilized as a violent but powerful weapon to make women’s voices heard, and clearly express women’s desire for freedom and life. As a matter of fact, in the “transition/transformation period”⁵ from 1898 Reform Movement,

² Ibid.

³ This argument is from Ma Zedong’s article, “Not a Suicide,” which was published by *Da Gong Bao* (Changsha) on Nov. 23rd, 1919.

⁴ The literary work *Lüehun* 掠婚 (Forced Marriage) is mentioned in the article, “1919 xinniàng Zhao Wuzhen huajiao zisha yinfa de wenhua zhanzheng” 1919 新娘趙五貞花轎自殺引發的文化戰爭 (The cultural war provoked by Zhao Wuzhen’s suicide in her bridal sedan chair in 1919) published *Fenghuang wang* 鳳凰網, on Sept. 11, 2009. Unfortunately, I have not found any detailed information about this work so far.

⁵ Scholars have different Chinese terms for this special period of time, such as *guodu shidai* 過渡時代 (Liang Qichao) and *zhuanxing shidai* 轉型時代 (Hao Chang 張灝). I use “transition/transformation period” to emphasize the main characteristic of this period of time.

May Fourth Movement, to the early Republican period, “committing suicide” became a striking social phenomenon. According to the report of *Minguo Ribao* 民國日報 (Daily News of Republican China) (Shanghai), in 1919, twenty-one people committed suicide, and it increased to forty-seven in 1920, and sixty-six in 1921. In terms of women’s suicide, according to *Funü Ribao* 婦女日報 (Women’s Daily), there were twenty-seven women from different places who committed suicide within one month.⁶ Due to the increasing trend of suicide practice, and its social impact that was enforced by the press and media, the phenomenon of suicide not only aroused the attention of the government, but also generated the debate of its social meaning among intellectuals, such as Mao Zedong, Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, and Li Dazhao 李大釗. These literati not only showed their concerns regarding these tragedies, but also debated over the deeper reasons behind these suicide tragedies and the social and moral problems revealed through these suicides, such as social darkness, the deficiency of social system and structure, as well as dangerous and radical views of life. It was because of their attention to the impact of suicide practice and the significance of martyrdom as well as their efforts to promote more positive views of social and individual values that people were encouraged to seek healthier ways of life during the New Culture Movement.

Of course, in this process, because of the increasing number of women’s suicide, women’s questions and problems aroused more social concerns. With the exploration of reasons behind these women’s suicide, women’s liberation movement became more

⁶ These figures are from the article “Wusi shiqi zhongguo shehui zhuanxing yu zisha xianxiang” 五四時期中國社會轉型與自殺現象 (The transition of Chinese society and suicide phenomenon during the May Fourth period) written by Qi Weiping 齊衛平, which is published by *Minguo Chunqiu* 民國春秋 issue No. 3, 1998.

active. Exceptional women who bravely sacrificed their lives through suicide practices utilized women martyrdom as a radical but powerful motive to encourage women to fight for their freedom and rights.

The practice of suicide continued to generate greater social responses and incite social transformation, as did the act of assassination. A good example is the case of Shi Jianjiao 施劍翹 (1905 or 1906-1979), who assassinated the former warlord Sun Chuanfang 孙传芳 to avenge her father's death in 1935. The story of Shi's revenge killing and the legal proceedings for her act drew a significant amount of public and media attention. This case also aroused public debates over the concepts of filial piety and the regulation of law. After nine months of hearing, Shi's case was transferred from Taijin District Court, to Heibei Superior Court, and finally to the Nanjing Supreme Court. Because of "mitigating circumstances deserving of judicial compassion" (Lean 108), Shi was sentenced to seven years, which was ultimately waived by the Nationalist government. In her book *Public Passions*, Eugenia Lean not only provides thorough research on Shi's case, but also explores the role of "emotion/feeling" (*qing* 情) and "public sympathy" (*tongqing* 同情)—a new communal form of ethical sentiment (3-4) in politics. Along with the examination of the rise of "public sympathy," Lean also discusses "the relationship between *qing* and violence, the role of assassination in the broader culture, and the role of violence in constituting boundaries among ethics, justice, and political power" (16). By examining Shi's case in conjunction with a few other cases of Republican-era revenge and crimes of passion, Lean switches the approach to the issue of violence from "a description of the straightforward institutional and political use of force and terror to an analysis of the *meanings* attributed to violence" (17). In other

words, Lean reveals that even though the principle that the rule of law should prevail the public was popularized in the New Culture Movement, in the post May Fourth period, people favored a judicial system that took the role of *qing* into consideration.

In some newspaper editorials of that time, Shi Jianqiao was regarded as a modern knight-errant and exceptional woman, and her story also generated many fictionalized stage dramas. Just like the women characters in the novel, *The Stone of Goddnes Nüwa*, Shi's violent act of killing was legitimized as means of pursuing justice, and their passion for killing were significantly attached to certain form of *qing*, either out of the love of the nation and women or because of the ritual expression of filial piety. In addition, as Lean also points out, through the case of Shi Jianqiao and other women avengers at this time, as well as the different attitudes towards the extreme violence associated with such kind of killing, there lies "the question of who had the right or power to define justice and to determine the exact relationship between *qing* and violence in modern society" (17). Although in the ideal fictional Women's Kingdom in *The Stone of Goddnes Nüwa*, women have the absolute power and right to define justice, in the case of Shi Jianqiao, public sympathy really functioned as a kind of political power. After all, the Nationalist government finally pardoned Shi Jianqiao after acknowledging public opinion. Exceptional women who act violently out of passion and moral motivations, once again, became national heroines.

As Lean has described, because passionate assassinations (as well as suicides, in my opinion) appeal to the discourse of "public sympathy," these women were circulated and interpreted as exceptional women. It is also because of the unique power associated with the act of killing in political discourses that the question of life and death is worth

further examination. Particularly, as discussed in my dissertation and by many scholars, the ultimate goal of killing is salvation. In terms of the theme of “saving,” the “moderate and pragmatic” ways for women’s emancipation and salvation highly valued in the novel *Chivalric Beauties* have encouraged more and more women to free themselves from family boundaries and become career women working as principals, doctors, journalist, lawyers, and more. There are so many studies in this subject, especially with the increasing attention to issues such as women’s mental and economical independence, women’s social status and roles, as well as women’s values presented by breaking the boundaries of inner (*nei* 内) and outer (*wai* 外) spheres. These studies also shift the focus from studying famous women figures, such as Zhang Zhujun 張竹君, Lü Bicheng 呂碧城, and Chen Xiefen 陳擷芬, to more diverse women who may be comparatively less known by the public but had been active in women’s movement. The focus has also shifted from examining public articles and editorials, to women’s personal documents, writings, and diaries, as well as women’s oral narrations of their own stories and experiences. Wang Zheng’s book *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment* is a good example. In this book, Wang interviews eight Chinese women—“forgotten heroines”—who used their own words and actions to express how they acted upon or reacted to May Fourth feminism, and how they appropriated Western ideologies in the pursuit of national salvation and self-emancipation. From the perspective of gender, Wang approaches the relationship between feminism and nationalism and reconfigures the history of Chinese Enlightenment by pointing out how women embraced feminism as it directs to a new way of life. Both Lean’s work and Wang’s research acknowledge the value of approaching Chinese women question from the perspective of life and death. Moreover, their studies

concentrate on either May Fourth period or post May Fourth period, which provide a helpful direction to further extend my dissertation into a more systematic project.

Given the rich and diverse resources in the images of exceptional women, my dissertation cannot examine all representations of exceptional women in all available sources, particularly because, as the above-mentioned examples demonstrate, images of exceptional women and their spirit are continuously enriched by the cultural, social, and political changes of the Chinese society. But, it is my aim to take this dissertation as a first step towards a systematic exploration of more valuable sources in late Qing materials and later periods to further study the transformations represented by exceptional women, especially through their understandings and practices associated with the question of life and death. The long-term goal of my project is to understand and unravel the complexity evoked by late imperial representations of femininity, the nation, and the question of life and death.

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